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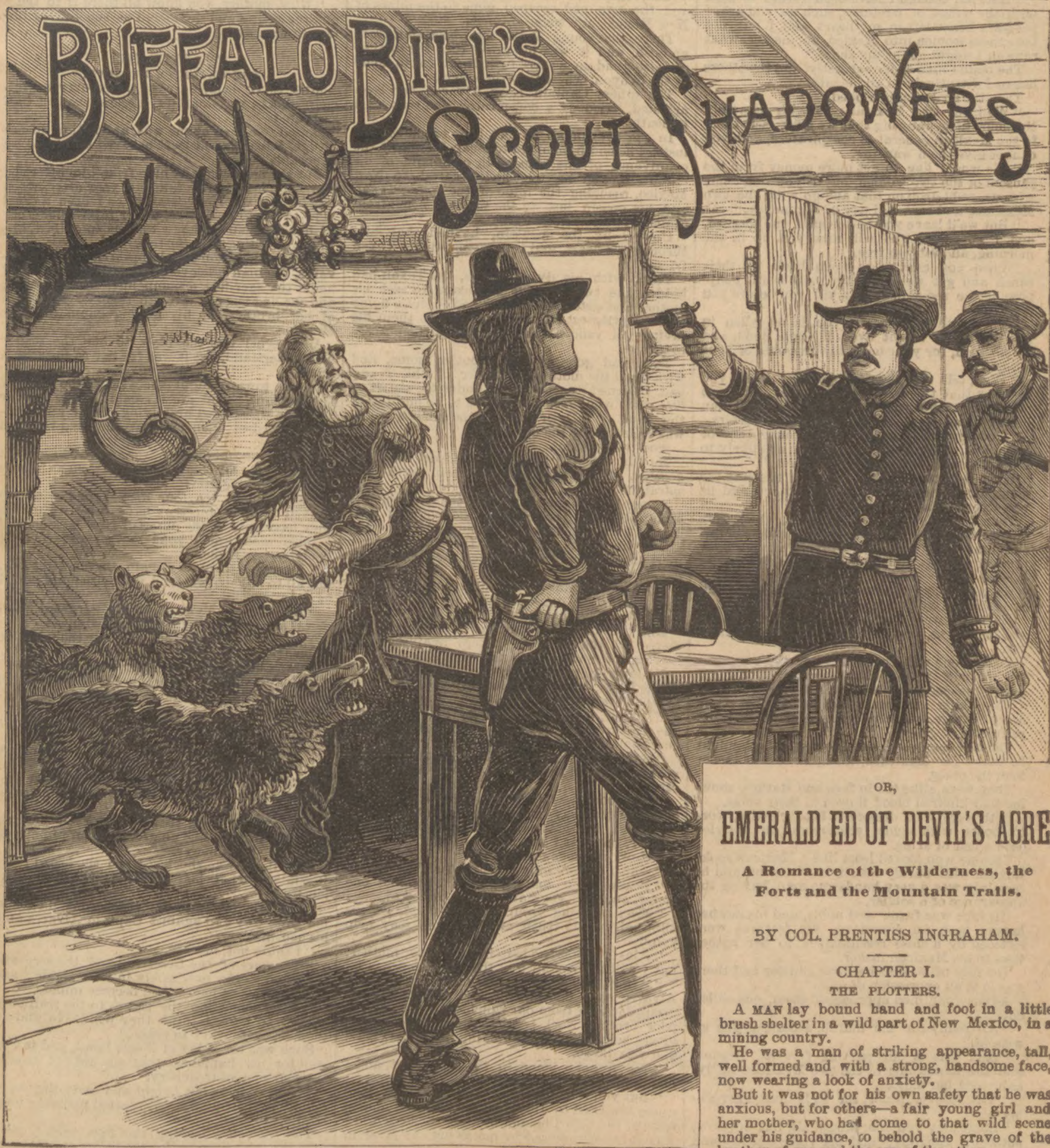
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DASHING CHARLIE HAD SPRUNG INTO THE DOORWAY WITH FRANK POWELL'S
ENTRANCE, TO PROTECT HIS CHIEF.

OR,

EMERALD ED OF DEVIL'S ACRE.

A Romance of the Wilderness, the
Forts and the Mountain Trails.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I. THE PLOTTERS.

A MAN lay bound hand and foot in a little brush shelter in a wild part of New Mexico, in a mining country.

He was a man of striking appearance, tall, well formed and with a strong, handsome face, now wearing a look of anxiety.

But it was not for his own safety that he was anxious, but for others—a fair young girl and her mother, who had come to that wild scene under his guidance, to behold the grave of the brother of one and the son of the other.

Up in the canyon was that lonely grave, to see which had brought the two who loved the

one who rested there, a long way through deadly peril to visit.

In a cabin not far away, the home of the one who lay in the grave, were the mother and daughter, little dreaming of danger there to themselves.

As the man lay there in painful meditation a sound of voices reached his ears, and four men came to the little shelter.

They were a rough, wild-looking set, such men as would be set down as desperadoes in other places.

"Well, sergeant, we have come to ask you if you will side with us now ag'in' the women?" said one of the men.

"I will die before I would do any harm to them," was the determined response of the bound man.

"Bah! who is a-talking about harming them, for we only sees a chance to git gold out of 'em?"

"I know that you wish to seize and hold them prisoners here, until they send and get you a large sum as ransom money for their release.

"I know that the chief, our leader, whom we all know only as the Deserter Captain, selected us from his band to conduct these ladies and those two Mexicans here, and then, making them prisoners, carry them to Mexico, where there are prices set upon the heads of the men, and the females are to be held to await his coming.

"But, no; though I have been forced to herd with the vilest of wretches, such as you are, I yet have honor left in my heart, and I will not take these women into Mexico, no matter what ransom I might get as my share."

The bound man spoke earnestly, and the others listened attentively to all he said.

Then the spokesman replied:

"Well, the two Mexicans go with us within the hour, little knowing that we are to sell them to the Mexican general as conspirators, and you cannot give them warning.

"We would like to get more money from the ransom of the two women, but as you won't side with us, we'll drop on that and go with the two Mexicans, and that will pay us big money.

"But we'll leave you here bound and gagged, and I guess the girl will look you up in the morning, and set you free.

"Then you can guide them back to their ranch and get well paid for your work, I suppose, if the red-skins don't kill you before you get there.

"The truth is, sergeant, you have fallen in love with the bright eyes of Bessie Bond, and are no good, for your heart has repented of your misdeeds.

"Well, tell the Deserter Captain when you get back that there was more money for us in taking the two conspirators back to Mexico than in serving as members in his band of Deserters.

"Good-by, sergeant, and if the young lady or her mother don't find you here, you are likely to starve to death or be eaten by wolves."

With this the speaker forced a gag into the man's mouth, in spite of his resistance, and he was a very giant in strength.

Then they picked up their traps, which were scattered about, bridled and saddled their horses and went away down the canyon, leaving their prisoner helpless and alone in the little shanty of bushes.

As they neared the cabin two men came out, accompanied by two ladies.

The latter were both dressed in riding habits and sombreros, just suited for wear on the frontier.

Though one was the mother of the other she did not look it, so youthful and lovely was her face, so graceful was her form.

The young girl was one of radiant beauty in every feature, and her form was exquisite in its perfection of grace.

The two men were dark-faced, and both might be taken for Mexicans, though one was darker than the other.

They were alike too in face and stature, showing that kindred blood flowed in their veins.

Both were well dressed in border attire, wore top-boots with spurs, sombreros, and carried each a belt of arms.

The one who looked least like a Mexican spoke English with hardly the slightest accent, and he certainly was a very handsome man, having the appearance of a soldier.

His face was frank and noble, and his mother having been an American, his features were softened by a close resemblance to her rather than to his Mexican father.

The face of his kinsman was sinister and there was in it an expression of evil.

As the four men approached them, one called out:

"All ready for the march, senors, as you go with us."

"And this is our parting forever, Bessie?" said the handsomer of the two Mexicans softly, as he took her hand.

"Yes, forever, senor, for so it must irrevocably be.

"Some day you may know all, but not now, not now. Good-by," and her voice was low and full of tears.

"Senorita Bessie, we part now, but we shall

meet again," said the other Mexican, grasping her hand, as his comrade turned away.

"No, we must never meet again," said Bessie Bond in a decided tone, very different from her manner toward the other.

"I say yes," was the almost savage reply, and he leaped into his saddle and rode off with the others, leaving the mother and daughter alone at the cabin, little knowing what the plotters had decided on.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE SECRET.

"BESSIE, it is sad indeed to see you forced to drive from you that noble man Leon Alvarez."

So said Mrs. Bond as she stood gazing sadly after the two Mexicans, as they rode away with the four men who had plotted their death, for it must be known that the two men were cousins, and bearing the same name.

One had been a captain of Lanceros in the Mexican Army, and the idol of his men, the other a lieutenant of infantry, and a man popular with few.

A whisper of a conspiracy had gone about, that the captain was conspiring against the Government, and his cousin was suspected of being his ally.

The latter had been arrested and thrown into prison, along with the brother of Bessie Bond, a Texan, suspected of being in the conspiracy, and the two had escaped, gone to the mines of New Mexico, and turned miners.

There the young Texan had been shot from ambush, and it was his grave that the mother and sister had gone there to visit, his cabin home in the canyon, where they then were.

The other, Captain Leon Alvarez, had been arrested, tried as a conspirator, and sentenced to death.

In the eyes of all he had been executed, but instead he had been aided to escape death by the connivance of the officers in command of his execution, and he, too, had escaped to New Mexico, reaching the mine of the young Texan and his cousin just as the shot had come from ambush to lay the other low.

Unseen by the assassin, he had shot him through the heart, and thus avenged his Texan friend.

Then, with his dying words, the Texan had bidden the two fugitive Mexicans to seek his mother and sister, where they had found a home on the Northwest frontier, and give to them his savings in yellow dust, and bring them to see his grave.

They had gone to that frontier home, and with them the mother and sister of the Texan had returned to the cabin under the escort of five men who were not known to be outlaws of the band of "Deserters," as the lawless league was called along the border.

And the captain?

He who was written down as dead to all, on account of his supposed execution as a conspirator?

A noble man, he had won the love of the Texan beauty, Bessie Bond, and yet had been driven from her, though why he could not tell.

She told him only that they must never meet again, and he had accepted the alternative.

With his cousin it was different, for he too had learned to love the maiden and he had vowed that she should see him again.

And thus the two Mexicans rode away at the mercy of the outlaw plotters against them, leaving the mother and daughter alone.

In answer to what her mother had said, Bessie Bond, with her beautiful eyes filled with tears had responded:

"Mother, it is sad indeed to drive from me one who loves me as Captain Alvarez does, and one whom I love with all my heart.

"But there is a secret that I must tell you now in full, and that is that I am bound to another."

"You confessed loving Captain Alvarez, my child, yet now say that you love another."

"No, I did not say that I loved another, mother, but that I was bound to him."

"How, by an engagement?"

"Ah! if it were only that, mother."

"Bessie, from me you have only had one secret, and that you have darkly hinted at.

"Keep nothing from me, my child, let me know all of the truth, and perhaps I may help you."

"Alas! there is no help for me now, mother, but I will tell you all that there is to tell.

"After the supposed execution of Captain Alvarez as a conspirator, and the mysterious disappearance from our ranch in Texas, of my poor brother Noel, I begged you to leave our lovely home, to seek an abiding-place elsewhere, and you did so.

"We found a home in the Northwest, and I had hoped that we would live there in peace.

"But you remember on our way we were held up on the trail by the Deserter Captain, and in spite of the closed helmet he wore as a mask, he was at once recognized by me as my old lover in Texas, Vincent."

"Yes, he had gone utterly to the bad, yet was

one who could have made his mark in the world as a splendid man."

"He has a bad heart, mother, and was destined for an evil life.

"I believe now that he was a fugitive from justice when he lived in Texas.

"Well, mother, he thought he would force me to obey his will, but as I recognized him as the Deserter Captain, and knew that he was living a double life at the fort as a Mexican, Don Eduardo Vincente, I held him in my power.

"You knew him, too, mother, as he was, yet dared not betray him; but let me now tell you the full hold he has upon me."

"I half suspect it, my child, for I believe you sacrificed yourself for another," sadly said Mrs. Bond.

"Alas! that was just what I did, mother, yet I cannot say that I regret it, for it saved Captain Alvarez from death."

"Saved Alvarez?"

"Yes, mother, for he was doomed to die, and I knew that Vincent Edwards could save him, as he held his executioner, Captain Sebastian, in his power.

"So I sent for him, and told him if he would save Alvarez, I would become his wife."

"Oh, Bessie!"

"He did save him, and I married the man, keeping my word, but banishing him from me at once, and that is why I sought a hiding-place in the home we now have, and there, to my horror, discovered him.

"Now, mother, you know all there is to tell," and the young girl shuddered as she buried her face in her hands.

CHAPTER III.

THE OUTLAW'S RESOLVE.

MRS. BOND seemed deeply moved over the full confession of her daughter, a secret she had half suspected.

Bound to a man as she was, at the time of her pledge, Bessie had at least believed him to be an honorable person.

But she had sought to hide from him after she had kept her compact, and a year after, when moving to the Northwest, it had been a cruel blow to her to find there, under false colors, her husband, whom she knew then as an outlaw, one who was hiding from justice.

Then in their home had appeared Captain Alvarez, the man she loved, and for whom she had made the sacrifice, accompanied by his cousin, and she had learned through them of the death of her brother, at his mining cabin in New Mexico.

How cruel was the blow to her the reader can understand, yet it was for her to suffer still more.

When toward night she went to the camp of the sergeant, as no answer came to her call for him, she discovered him lying bound and gagged, it flashed upon her that they had been led into a trap.

Quickly she unbound the sergeant and removed the gag from his mouth, when, as soon as he was able to speak he said:

"Miss Bond, the four men I had with me proved traitors, for they have deserted me, as they have gone to the mines of New Mexico, and I must alone guide your mother and yourself back to your home.

"I begged them to remain, threatened them, but all to no purpose, for I was seized and bound as you found me."

"And the two Mexican senors, Sergeant Mayhew?" asked Bessie with strange calmness.

The sergeant dared not tell her the truth, so replied:

"They have gone on their way, Miss Bond."

"But of course knew nothing of these men not returning after they had escorted them to a certain point?"

"Of course not, Miss Bond, the Mexicans were wholly innocent."

"Well, sergeant, I will go and acquaint my mother with what you have told me, the exact situation as it is, and I think we had better prepare to start back to Ranch Isle to-morrow morning."

"It will be best, Miss Bond, for the danger upon the trail will be no greater than remaining here," was the answer.

Mrs. Bond was shocked when she heard from Bessie just what had occurred and asked anxiously:

"Do you think those treacherous men can meditate any evil against Captain Alvarez and his cousin?"

"I think not, mother."

"They are of the Deserter band, the sergeant says, and being now safely in New Mexico, are anxious to turn honest and become miners."

"After escorting the senors to the trail they wished to take, I think they will leave and go their separate ways in peace."

Such was the belief of Bessie Bond, and it was well for her happiness that she did not suspect the four men of treachery.

The next morning bright and early the party mounted their horses and started upon the long trail northward.

The sergeant, leading the two pack-horses, loaded with all to make the ladies comfortable upon the trail, rode on in advance, while the

mother and daughter, as they halted by the side of the grave, looked sadly down upon it for the last time, for it held one they had loved most devotedly as son and brother.

Then they moved on after the sergeant and were launched upon the long march to their frontier home.

There was that about the sergeant that could not fail to win admiration.

A man of commanding presence, he looked the perfect soldier, and there was about him an air of mystery, a something that told he was one who had not willingly turned to the life of an outlaw.

He had been suggested to Bessie Bond and her mother as a competent guide, by none other than Edward Vincent, the Deserter Captain, and he had thus far proven most faithful to them.

When they went into their first night's camp Mrs. Bond and Bessie got supper while the sergeant looked after the horses.

After the meal Bessie said in her frank way:

"You bear the title of sergeant."

"Have you not been a soldier?"

"I have, Miss Bond."

"It is strange, sergeant, that you should ever have become one of the band of the Deserter Captain?"

"There are circumstances in our lives, Miss Bond, which we cannot always control, and Fate leads us at times where it will."

"I did not go wrong from a desire to do evil, but because I was utterly unable to continue a career of honor."

"Yet you are certainly able to break off from your evil associations now, sir?"

"Yes, I may do so now," he said with marked significance in his tone.

"I have," he added, "since meeting you and your mother, seen all the wickedness of my life in its veriest enormity."

"I shall therefore break loose from the outlaw band of which I have been a member, and endeavor to lead a new life once more, a life I feared was never to be mine again."

"And where will you go, what will you do?"

"I do not know," he said dejectedly.

"You are a man of education, and refinement."

"Oh, yes, I was reared a gentleman, Miss Bond; but there are reasons why I cannot go East again, or into civilization, so I must cling to the Border."

"Well, sir, if you care to accept it, a place on our ranch is open to you to begin with at least."

"Yes, indeed, for I willingly join in the offer," Mrs. Bond said, and the reply of the man was uttered with deep feeling:

"Most gladly do I accept, and with deepest gratitude, for it will be a stepping-stone for me to a life of honor once again."

CHAPTER IV.

RIVALS.

THE two Mexicans rode out of the canyon side by side, with a couple of the escort behind and ahead, and with no thought that they had purposely been thus placed.

A silence fell between the two Mexicans, the thoughts of both busy with their parting from Bessie Bond.

Captain Alvarez was feeling keenly that he was going into banishment forever from the woman he loved.

Yet, he had no thought of disobeying her command to remain away from her.

He had gone to her home, to give her the last message of her dying brother.

There had been in his heart the hope that he might claim her as his wife, for he knew that he owed his life to her, and yet that she had bidden him leave her forever.

But he had not learned her secret, and once more was bidden to depart, and, loving her he obeyed.

The other, Lieutenant Alvarez, parted from her with the firm determination to see her again.

In his visit to her home he had learned to desperately love her, and though she had told him there was no hope for him, he had vowed yet to win her.

She had, also, told him never to see her again, and yet he had vowed that he would return and claim her.

He had learned to hate his cousin, for he felt that there was something between him and Bessie Bond, and that he only sought to get rid of him to return to her.

In fact he regarded the farewell between the two as simply a mock affair.

Since loving Bessie, and feeling that his cousin was in his way, the lieutenant had lost every atom of regard for his kinsman, and had secretly vowed that he would put him out of the way.

As they now rode along together between their treacherous escort, the lieutenant said with a sneer:

"That little game between you was well played, Captain Alvarez."

"I don't understand you, Leon."

"Why, that pretended parting between Bessie Bond and yourself."

"Why, my dear Leon, do you not know how

madly I have loved her, and now have been driven from her presence, never to return?"

"It is not so."

"Explain, please."

"You acted your parts to deceive me, and yet you failed to do so."

"To deceive you?" asked Captain Alvarez, in surprise.

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"You love the girl."

"Admitted, of course, but, pray, speak of her with more respect."

"You think she loves you?"

"I grant that I have thought so, and yet she drives me from her."

"You say this to try and throw me off my guard."

"How are you interested in the case, Leon?"

"I love her, too."

"I am certainly sorry for you."

"Well, my chances are about as good as yours, though you are an old lover, and that may be an advantage."

"Yet I love her, and I am determined to win her."

"Ah, Leon, you have undertaken a giant task, for Bessie Bond will never be won by any man, I verily believe."

"She did tell me that she loved me, and I owe my life to her; but then she will not become my wife, and so I say to you that your hope is hopeless to win her."

"Yes, Leon, awake from a dream which can only bring misery upon you."

"I shall not take your advice, my cousin, for it is not disinterested."

"You are the best judge, Leon."

"Well, you bade farewell to the senorita with the firm determination of getting rid of me and going back to her, and she knew that such was the case."

"Upon my honor, no, neither in her case or mine."

"A man in love does not know what honor is."

"A man of honor at least never finds an occasion arise to forget that he must be guided by right," was the answer.

"Well, Captain Alvarez, let me tell you that I have decided to go back to Ranch Isle and lay claim to the heart and hand of the Senorita Bessie Bond."

"It will be a bootless, fruitless errand, Leon."

"I have not such a belief."

"What foundation have you for such a thought?"

"Well, in the first place I am sure that she is a sad coquette, and such women have what the French call a *cœur d'artichoke*, that is a leaf for every lover."

"The boldest lover of all wins the prize, and I intend to be that one."

"You wrong Senorita Bond in this, Leon, for she is as true as steel."

"Bah! look at her actions *per contra*."

"What actions do you refer to?"

"She flirted with those two Englishmen at the fort, was devoted in her attentions to Surgeon Powell and Captain Frank Taylor, made pretty eyes at Lieutenant Onderdonk and even tried to make Buffalo Bill the scout fall in love with her."

"Leah, I cannot listen to this abuse of the Senorita Bond, for it is unkind and false," said Captain Alvarez, warmly.

"Well, Captain Alvarez, I can only reply that we both love the same woman, and I intend that she shall be my wife."

"If you consider her worth fighting for, then we may as well decide here the question as to who shall win the game we play for, as it shall be your life or mine."

"Why, Leon, you are mad!"

"I am perfectly sane, and you either do not consider the fair senorita worth fighting for, or you are—"

"What?" quickly asked Captain Alvarez, as the other paused.

"A coward," was the sneering response of the Mexican lieutenant.

CHAPTER V.

THE DUEL.

THE position of the two Mexicans was some hundred yards from either their two leaders or the men who followed behind, for none of the three couples were close together.

Their conversation, thus far in a suppressed tone, had not been heard by the others, as they rode along.

The outlaws, too, wishing to converse together, were glad to ride out of ear-shot until the time came to act for themselves.

When Lieutenant Alvarez threw the word coward in the face of the captain, the latter turned deathly pale.

He had too splendid a record for any one ever to accuse him of a lack of courage.

The charge, too, that he did not consider Bessie Bond worth fighting for, was galling to one of his extremely sensitive nature, where love and honor were paramount to all else.

The hot blood came back into his face with a

sudden rush, and he dropped his hand upon his revolver, as though to draw and use it.

But in an instant he dropped his hand to his side and he said calmly:

"Leon, the same blood flows in our veins, and we bear the same name."

"Were it otherwise I would have resented your words at once; but now I will pass them over as though unsaid."

"But they were said, and more, Leon Alvarez."

"Yes, I will say that you *fear* to fight for a woman you profess to love, and more, that you are a coward—see!" and with the word he struck Captain Alvarez lightly in the face with the back of his open hand.

At the blow, light as it was, a cry broke from the lips of the Conspirator Captain, and he drew rein suddenly and leaped to the ground, while he said in a voice that trembled:

"Leon Alvarez, were you my own brother you should answer for that insult with your life."

The other laughed viciously and also leaped from his horse, while he called out:

"Ho, men, come here!"

The men ahead turned back in surprise at the call, while those in the rear hastened to catch up.

"What is it, gents?" asked one who was spokesman for the party.

"Oh, it's only a small matter, and the captain and I intend to settle it right here."

"You see, we both love the same lady, and hence we are rivals for her hand."

"As we both can't marry her, why we intend to fight it out and let the best man win."

"Oh, that's it, is it?"

"Yes."

"And you wants us ter see fair play?"

"Exactly."

"Well, we'll do it; won't we, pards?"

A general assent was the answer.

"Now, gents, my idee is that yer both has ter have weapons alike, and loaded squar', so me and one o' my pards has guns jist as like as two peas, and we'll load 'em up fer yer, count ther distance off, and give ther word."

"That is just it, my friend," said the lieutenant.

"Is this satisfactory to you, cap'n?"

"Yes, any arrangement is, though I regret that this affair has happened."

"You be brothers, hain't yer?"

"No, we are cousins."

"Waal, that hain't so bad; but when does yer wish ter have it out?"

"Now," said Captain Alvarez.

"Yes, it may as well be at once, so prepare the weapons."

The spokesman of the outlaws and one other stepped apart, and conversed together in a low tone for a minute or more.

Then they examined the weapons they had in their hands, and approaching the two Mexicans, said:

"Gents, we has left one cartridge in each gun, and we intends ter place yer jist ten paces apart."

"All right," said the lieutenant, briskly, while Captain Alvarez bowed in silence.

"I shall give the word, and you are to stand with your backs to each other, wheel and fire."

"A good arrangement."

"Is that satisfactory to you, Captain Alvarez?"

"Yes, perfectly, Leon," was the reply of the captain.

"Now, gents, yer must both give up all yer other weepens fer me ter keep, fer this have got ter be a square fight."

Captain Alvarez handed over his belt of arms and his cousin did likewise.

"Now, gents, the words is:

"Ready!"

"Right about!"

"Fire!"

"Does yer understand?"

"Perfectly," said the lieutenant, while the captain bowed in silence.

Then the two duelists were placed in position, when Captain Alvarez said:

"Men, if I fall, turn over to my cousin, Lieutenant Alvarez, all of my effects, horse and weapons."

"That's uncommon generous, cap'n, but you know best, and we'll do it."

"Thank you."

As Lieutenant Alvarez said nothing, the outlaw spokesman asked:

"And if you turns up yer toes, pard?"

"I will not die."

"I shall kill him," was the decided response.

"Waal, you talks confident like, and no mistake, but if you should run right ag'in' a bullet?"

"Then t ke all I possess back to Miss Bond, for I shall make her the heiress to the little I possess."

"And that reminds me, my friend, that I have here a leather case—see, in it is a miniature and several letters."

"I place this ring in it also, and if I fall, take this back to Miss Bond, but all else turn over to my cousin here."

"I'll do as yer wants, pards, and no mistake."

"Now, is yer ready for ther fight?"

Both bowed, the revolvers were placed in their hands, and then the spokesman and the others stepped to one side.

The two Mexicans stood calm and silent for a minute, and then came the command, sharply spoken:

"Ready!"

"Right about!"

"Fire!"

With the words the two men wheeled, and their weapons were brought to a level, a sharp report following.

CHAPTER VI.

ENTRAPPED.

THERE was but one report of a revolver, and that came from the weapon of the Mexican lieutenant.

Its result was not evident by any action or look of Captain Alvarez, who said calmly:

"Leon, I risked your shot at me, and as I would not have your life upon my hands, I fired into the air."

With the last word he raised his revolver and pulled trigger.

"Curses! do you think I am to be satisfied with this?"

"It shall be your life or mine, kindred or no kindred, Senor Captain Alvarez," hissed the furious lieutenant, and turning to the four men with them, he continued:

"Come, load these weapons again, and let the firing continue until one of us shall fall dead."

Three of the men glanced at the fourth, who was the leader.

He was a rough-looking fellow, armed to the teeth, and the kind of a man it would not do to trifle with.

His men called him Red Robin, and he was not badly named, for his deeds had been of the red-handed kind.

"I say, pard, that wasn't no real fight," he replied in answer to the words of the Mexican lieutenant, and all of the men laughed at this.

"What do you mean, sir?" savagely asked the lieutenant.

"I mean that you got up a row with the cap'n for some reason, about that pretty gal I reckons, and yer wanted ter fight it out."

"Waal, we likes a leetle fun, and so we jist put our noddles tergether and concluded we'd see how game yer was."

"So we loaded ther weepens with powder only, and I must say yer both were game as roosters, though ther cap'n has got more narve than you has, Mister Lieutenant."

"What! you dared play a joke on me?"

"On both of yer."

"Why did you do this?"

"Because we didn't wish yer kilt."

"What are we to you cut-throats?"

"I'll tell yer, as yer wants ter know."

"I do wish to know why you have dared thus trifle with two gentlemen who have a quarrel and wish to settle it as gentlemen should."

"Waal, you is valuable to us, that's all."

"Valuable?"

"That's what you is."

"We expect to pay you for guiding us to the point we seek."

"That hain't it."

"Well?"

"You see you is wu'th a fortune to us."

"Please explain."

"I seen a chance ter capter yer both without bloodshed, when yer said as how yer wanted ter fight a duel, and so we got hold of your weepens."

"Ha! we are disarmed," cried the lieutenant, while, now speaking for the first time, Captain Alvarez said:

"Men, explain what this means, please?"

"Waal, cap'n, as you is cool as a icicle and kin understand the situation, I wish ter say that we is men o' the band o' outlaws known as The Deserters."

"Our cap'n got ther sergeant ter take us along as guard to ther two ladies who wished ter visit ther grave back in ther canyon."

"Ther cap'n made a plan with the sergeant ter carry out, and he were ter take the whole outfit to Mexico—"

"To Mexico?" came the surprised query from both officers.

"That's it, to Mexico, where you was all ter be given up to wait his coming there to get the blood-money you would bring."

"This is infamous!"

"Yas, cap'n, but a man on the s'arch fer gold don't choose his methods according ter Gospel."

"Ther sergeant weakened, as he fell in love with ther gal, and tuk a shine to you, and so concluded ter let you go free and carry ther leddies back ag'in."

"But we tumbled to his racket, and so we jist laid out ter run the game ourselves."

"As we c'u'dn't git ther leddies along without trouble, we let 'em go back with ther sergeant."

"But you we knows is wanted in Mexico and there will be big money paid for yer."

"So we pretended we would jist say we'd

show yer ther trail to the upper country, while we went to ther mines."

"In this way we made things jump our way and here we is with you our prisoners ter be taken ter General Garza in Mexico."

"See?"

The two Mexicans did see.

The whole plot was laid bare before them.

The lieutenant saw how his hatred of his rival cousin had caused the two to be disarmed and at the mercy of their four armed foes.

Had they been armed it was a question as to whether they would have been taken, for the men would not have wished to kill them, and thus lose their chance of getting gold for delivering them up.

The captain's first thought was for Bessie Bond and her mother.

If the Deserter Captain had wished to get them also into Mexico, they were going back to their ranch to fall again into his power.

If the sergeant too was to prove a traitor, what then, for he too was an outlaw?

To resist those four men, all armed and with their revolvers now covering them, would be madness, for not a weapon did they have.

They certainly were in a desperate situation and they felt it.

But the lieutenant saw a chance to act for himself and at the same time carry out his revenge.

That was to ally himself with the four outlaws and sacrifice the captain, and having quickly formed this plan he said:

"Well, men, you hold the advantage, I admit; but I have a plot to unfold which will make you a fortune worth considering."

"Let's have it, pard," was Red Robin's rejoinder.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COMPROMISE.

WHETHER the four men really felt fear of the two disarmed Mexicans or not, it was certain that they considered it best to put them beyond resistance, before listening to the plot of the lieutenant, for Red Robin said:

"We kin listen more attentive, pard, when you is tied, so we'll jist put ther ropes upon yer."

Resistance was useless and Captain Alvarez acquiesced with perfect composure.

The lieutenant argued, urged, threatened and pleaded, but was bound all the same.

Then he had an attack of the sulks and said:

"No, I will do nothing to help you now to get a fortune."

"All right, pard, what we hain't had we can't miss, and we knows jist how we can turn you both inter gold."

As the men seemed indifferent, Lieutenant Alvarez came around and said:

"Well, I am naturally angry at you not trusting me; but I will tell you how I can help you."

"As yer can't help yerself, pard, we'd like ter know how yer kin sarve us," was Red Robin's philosophical rejoinder.

And Captain Alvarez wondered too how just now his cousin could plot to get the men a larger sum than their bodies, dead or alive, given over to the Mexican Government would do.

The men now went on to a good camping-place for the night, and after finding one and supper being over, they sat around the fire waiting to hear what the lieutenant had to propose.

Captain Alvarez was silent, and calm, whatever his thoughts were, while the lieutenant, given time to consider, by continuing on to a camp for the night, had been full of thoughts and schemes, and really appeared quite nervous.

"Now, pard lieutenant, we is anxious, and willing to hear you shout," said Red Robin as the four outlaws complacently lighted their pipes for their after-supper smoke.

"I'll tell you my position and plot in a nutshell, men," and facing the four captors the lieutenant continued:

"You see in my cousin here Captain Leon Luiz Alvarez, the noted conspirator against the Government of Mexico."

"He was a captain of Lancers, and was led astray by the belief that he could have a change of rulers, one whom he could aid to reach the head of the Government, and thus rise with him."

But he was surprised, tracked, caught in his conspiracy and sentenced to be secretly put to death, as his open execution, on account of his great popularity, would have caused trouble.

His execution nominally took place, but the one who commanded allowed him to escape, and it has reached Mexico that such was the case, though the truth has not been made public.

"I happen to know, however, that there is a large reward offered for his capture, and another for the betrayal of just how he escaped."

"Now with me, it is this way:

"Bearing the relationship of kinsman, also in the army, and having the identical name as my cousin here, I was naturally suspected of being in league with him in the plot of conspiracy."

"I was not, however, and I have all the proofs of this to sustain me."

"You would not, therefore, get any reward for delivering me up, as there is no price on my

head, and I have the facts to sustain my innocence."

"But, I can help you to hunt down the other conspirators, and will do so, and in this way:

"You certainly, as Americans, not speaking our tongue, could not go through Mexico bearing two Mexican officers as prisoners."

"The authorities would take them, put you out of the way very quickly, and get what money we were worth for themselves."

The four men looked at each other knowingly. They saw the truth of this reasoning.

"Now, my command was known only down about Vera Cruz, never operating at this northern border."

"I am not, therefore, known to any of the authorities by sight, even, and I can represent myself as Lieutenant Alva Luiz, which is a part of my name, and there is in my regiment an officer of that name."

"I can state that I captured this senor, Captain Alvarez, in America, with your aid, and you are engaged as his guard to go with me to Mexico."

"When we reach the proper person, General Garza, I will state to him that I am who I am, come to surrender myself to him, and that, with your aid, I can arrest and place in his power all the officers connected with the escape of Captain Alvarez."

"We will then go and capture them, and you will obtain your rewards for them, while I will secure my pardon for the services I have rendered the Government."

"You will then get your gold and I will get my pardon, and more, my revenge against this man, whom I wish out of my way."

"Now, men, you have heard my plan, and now I, as a Mexican officer, in charge of a prisoner, can reach General Garza, when you never could do so, not understanding the country, the language or the people you are going among."

"Look at it straight in the face, men, and you will see that you could never get far into Mexico without being killed and your prisoners taken from you."

"Do you see the truth of my statements now, my friends?"

"We does for a fact, pard, and I says we chips in with you ter pilot ther game through, for ter me yer holds ther trump keerds, and we loses ther game playin' a lone hand ag'in' yer," said Red Robin earnestly.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAITOR'S TRIUMPH.

HAVING expressed himself in favor of the compromise with the Mexican lieutenant, who thus treacherously had planned to escape himself by giving his cousin over to the authorities, Red Robin motioned to his three comrades to come apart with him for a talk.

They obeyed, and when they were out of ear-shot, began to converse earnestly together.

In the mean time Lieutenant Alvarez glanced nervously at his cousin, apparently expecting him to accuse him of treachery.

But Captain Alvarez did not open his lips, nor even glance at his traitor kinsman.

As he must speak, the lieutenant at last said:

"Well, Captain Alvarez, as I had not the chance to rid myself of you by facing death with you in a duel, I had to carry out my vow to remove you from my path."

"You did not face death in facing me, Leon, for I fired in the air."

"Had my pistol been loaded, and I wished to have killed you, I could have done so."

"Oh, I admit your being a dead shot; but as the duel was not allowed with loaded weapons by our captors, why I had to save myself, and do so at the sacrifice of your life."

"Oh, yes, I will be put to death this time, beyond all doubt, Leon."

"And I will go free."

"Yes, your life will be given you as the price for mine."

"But, Leon, you know that I am no conspirator against the Government, that the charges against me were false, and that some enemy planned to get rid of me."

"That enemy I now believe to have been the Texan, Edward Vincent, who had great influence in Mexico with those in authority, from secrets he in some way had gotten possession of."

"He loved Bessie Bond, and he it was who aided my escape, and supposed he had gotten rid of me forever."

"He is now playing a double game as Don Eduardo Vincente, at Fort Beauvoir, and is also, I firmly believe, from certain things I saw and heard while we were at Ranch Isle, none other than the Deserter Captain."

"Ah, thank you; I will go to Fort Beauvoir and sell my secret of him, as there is a reward on the head of the Deserter Captain."

"Yes, when I square matters in Mexico I will return, get my reward for the Deserter Captain, and then marry the fair Senorita Bessie, and I will have a support for life."

"Leon, you have as black a heart as any man who ever crossed my path."

"I can hardly believe that my blood flows in your veins."

"But it does, *amigo*, for our fathers were brothers, you know."

"Yes, I do know, alas, as I know now that you will sell my life to the Government."

"To save mine."

"Well, so be it. I have little to live for as a man condemned to death as a conspirator, yet innocent, and one who has been driven from the woman he loves."

"I am disgraced, a pauper, and loveless."

"I am a fugitive, and, before the world, a dead man."

"So let it be, Leon, for I am content to meet the fate before me, and I will meet it as a man, while I will say Heaven have mercy upon you when you come to die."

The lieutenant slightly shuddered at the words, yet, with a toss of his head, dismissed forebodings and replied:

"I am responsible only to myself for my actions."

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and I can only save myself by letting them take your life."

"But you are dead already before the world, so it cannot distress you much."

"It does not, as I am not of a revengeful nature."

"If I were, I would strive hard to live to be avenged upon you for this act of treachery."

"As it is, I only hope that I can save poor Bessie from your evil power, though I do not believe, now I think of it, that she will ever become your wife."

"No, no; oil and water will not mix; vice and virtue cannot go hand in hand."

"I have nothing to fear for her," and the face of the Mexican captain became radiant with the thought, while that of his evil cousin darkened as he felt that he could not make him show fear or suffering.

In a short while the four men returned and, as before, Red Robin was the spokesman.

They seated themselves silently and after a moment Red Robin said:

"Pard, we has been talkin' over your leetle game, and we has about concluded you is right, and that it is about all we kin do."

"You are wise."

"Yes, wisdom is what gits us ter play ter your hand, as we might git our necks stretched in Mexico, for we knows something of Dagos."

"Now we would all like to have it t'other way if we could."

"What way?"

"Why, thet it was you we was ter give up ter be shot, instead o' this manly pard here, for we likes him and we don't banker arter you."

The face of the lieutenant flushed, and he seemed about to reply in anger, but checking himself said:

"There is no price on my head, so you would get no money for me, while, as to your liking me or not is a matter of utter indifference to me, so long as you do not kill me."

"Well, it is agreed that I am to command, is it?"

"Yas, and we sets you free now," was the answer, and Red Robin freed the bonds upon the Mexican lieutenant, who turned with a malignant smile to his captive cousin and said in a low tone:

"Now, Senior Captain, I am master here."

CHAPTER IX.

THE LOST HEIR.

THE frontier post known as Fort Beauvoir was situated in a most beautiful and fertile country upon the very border of the land of the hostile Sioux.

There were mountains, valleys and plains, and for agricultural and cattle grazing purposes the country was all that the settler could desire.

Bold pioneers had pushed still further on toward the land of the setting sun, and established a home there, but one night of terror had left it a wreck of desolation, and the place had since been known as Massacre Valley.

To hold the Indians in check, a line of forts had been placed along the border, and Fort Beauvoir was about the most advanced one and perilous abiding-place from its position.

Near it, almost within its limits, had sprung up a settlement, and about it, back beyond the danger line, were scattered ranches here and there.

It was one of those ranches, miles away from the fort, where Mrs. Bond and her daughter Bessie had made their home.

The ranch, of thousands of acres, was almost an island, for only a narrow neck of land joined it to the mainland, and the broad, swiftly-flowing river wound around it, with steep banks that guarded the lands against intruders.

Across the neck of land was a stockade wall, high and strong, a wide ditch which had been cut to keep back a foe, and which really made the ranch an island.

A bridge crossed the ditch, and this could be raised from the further end by means of pulleys and a windlass, and the gate in the stockade was raised and lowered in the same way, so that the ranch could be defended successfully by a very few men, and was as strong as a fort.

Back from the stockade a quarter of a mile

was the large and comfortable cabin, with its piazzas, and well furnished for a far frontier home, while about it were cultivated gardens, flowers, out-buildings and the richest of grazing lands.

Such was the house of the Bonds, and it was known as Ranch Isle.

Other ranches scattered here and there were by no means so large, safe, or comfortable, nor were they occupied by such people as were Mrs. Bond and her beautiful daughter Bessie.

The fort was a very strong one, and well situated.

It had a considerable force of infantry, cavalry, and a battery of light artillery, while its home life was most attractive, in that, of the officers stationed there, many of them had their families with them, there being much to attract them to the fort.

Names famous in history were among the defenders of Fort Beauvoir, for there were Colonel Loyal, the commandant, Major Sidway, Captain Alfred Taylor of the gallant Fifth cavalry, Surgeon Frank Powell the Surgeon Scout, Buffalo Bill, Chief of Scouts, Texas Jack and many others.

At the time of the opening of this story there were visiting at Fort Beauvoir two Englishmen, who had come there upon a special mission.

One was Lord Lucien Lonsfield, the other Sir John Reeder, both officers of the English army.

Their mission to the frontier was to find the lost heir to a valuable estate in England and a title as well.

The heir was a kinsman of theirs, had been a gallant British officer in India, but after a fatal duel had resigned from the service and had long been unheard of.

As the two officers were interested in the inheritance, and were much attached to the missing heir, they had set out to find him.

Tracking him to the frontier they had been aided by Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell in their work, and had discovered that the heir, Granger Goldhurst by name, had married an American girl, and seeking a home in the Wild West had been a dweller in Massacre Valley at the time of the Sioux raid upon it.

The heir had been, it was said, killed by the red-skins, his wife had died in captivity, and their daughter, a young girl, had been picked up on the prairie by the Fifth Cavalry, and, adopted by the regiment, had found a home with Chaplain Ben Burton and his wife.

Known as Madge, the Daughter of the Regiment, the little girl had grown to beautiful womanhood and in her had been found an heir to the estates of Granger Goldhurst, her father.

Kidnapped by the Deserter Captain, who knew her history, and held for ransom, she had been tracked by Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell to the home of her captor in the settlement, Don Eduardo Vincente, who had been unmasked by the Surgeon Scout as the Deserter Captain.

The outlaw captain however had escaped being recaptured, and was once more free to carry on his deeds of evil, while his ally, known at the fort as Dandy Dan, had been taken prisoner and was held to suffer for his crimes.

Back to their home at Ranch Isle had Mrs. Bond and Bessie gone, safely guided thither by the outlaw sergeant, who had told the fair border girl enough of his history to have her place perfect confidence in him and his good intentions of reformation, wholly giving up his evil life.

So it was that Bessie Bond and the sergeant, who was known as Mayhew, had aided Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell in finding the place where Madge the heiress was hidden away by the Deserter Captain.

But the latter had slipped away, but whether he would dare still continue his life of lawlessness, with his band wiped out and a hunted man, was the question which was asked by all.

Such was the situation of affairs at Fort Beauvoir when it is brought to the notice of the reader and the characters there presented to him.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEVIL'S ACRE.

THE settlement near the fort was an odd community, made up of a few discharged soldiers, who had not cared to leave the frontier, storekeepers, teamsters, cowboys, miners, idle hangers-on about an army post, the families of soldiers, guides, scouts, trappers, hunters and a very large mixture of a bad element of desperate men.

The settlement numbered half a dozen stores, a couple of blacksmith shops, a combination church and school-house, and a score of saloons with a gambling annex.

There were representatives of many nationalities, with the Americans being in the majority, a few negroes, Chinese and Indians, while Mexicans had also found an abiding place in what had not been unappropriately named "Hades City."

The most attractive place in the settlement was the gambling saloon of Emerald Ed.

It had been built with some pretensions to architecture, and with its gambling den, saloon, piazzas and surroundings occupied just an acre of ground.

It was situated back against a cliff in a range of hills, and was built of logs, covered with boards, for a saw-mill was not far away from the settlement.

The "piazzas" were only an extension of the roof some ten feet beyond the log walls, and with the earth for flooring.

Within were rows of tables for card playing, with a bar extending across the rear, and at night attended by half a dozen men, all of whom had a "record" as man-killers.

There was a raised platform, too, at one end, in a wing that extended toward the cliffs, and this was the "throne" of a woman gambler.

She was known by the different names of "The Faro Fairy" and "Keno Kate," and it was said that her luck seldom deserted her.

What tie there was between Emerald Ed, the proprietor, and Keno Kate, no one knew or could find out.

It was said that he simply engaged her as a faro dealer, having discovered her in one of the frontier camps running a gambling house of her own.

Some said that she was Emerald Ed's wife, others asserted that she was his sister, but no one seemed to know the truth regarding her.

She appeared in the gambling hall at her pleasure, played to win, and disappeared the way she had entered, by a door in the end of the wing where she presided.

Superbly dressed always, glittering with precious stones, and beautiful in face and form, Keno Kate won all with whom she came in contact, and was considered by the officers of the fort as a lovely, unfathomable mystery.

Her home was under the shadow of the cliffs, a three-room cabin of logs, well-furnished, and her only companion an Indian woman of the Pawnee tribe.

No one was ever seen to visit the Faro Fairy's home, and there was about it a stockade wall, with a massive gate, while a huge dog served as a guard by day and night.

She kept several horses and rode to and fro at will, but always alone.

By night, at the Devil's Acre, as Emerald Ed's gambling saloon was called, the Faro Fairy was in her element.

She had a smile for all, was courteous and a skilled manipulator of the pasteboards.

If she did not appear in her place at any time she was missed by one and all.

And Emerald Ed? He was an enigma to all, one past finding out.

He had come to the frontier some time before, and had made his mark as a gambler, and a dead shot.

He had gotten a band of men together, and put them to work upon his house and his gambling den, paying liberally for all services rendered.

His cabin was in the rear of his saloon, connected by stockade walls, and stood back against the cliffs.

There he had his horse, and a giant Chinnee for a servant, and who properly rejoiced in the name of "Too Slick."

At times Too Slick would come into the saloon and gamble, always playing to win, but almost invariably ending as loser.

But this never deterred him from venturing again and again to down the game, which, with so many others, was a forlorn hope.

Too Slick was six feet eight inches in height, a perfectly formed man and an athlete.

He had, in spite of his innocent look, shown his claws on several occasions, and though hidden by his blouse-shirt, all in the settlement had come to know that he carried a belt of arms within reach, if not within sight, and knew how to use them too, while his strength was wonderful.

Elegant Ed was a man to meet in a lifetime.

He was an athlete in form, erect, and graceful, and dressed always in black velvet or broadcloth, while he wore a high hat that shone like glass.

His clothes fitted him perfectly, his shoes were always highly polished, and when not wearing kid gloves he carried them in one hand.

He was a man whose face was striking, for with black eyes he had a full blonde beard, and his hair hung in golden curls upon his shoulders.

He wore eye-glasses, as though near-sighted, yet was known to be a dead shot.

Courtly in manners and always speaking in a low, musical voice, he yet reminded a close observer of a sleeping tiger, one dangerous to arouse.

In his scarf shone a splendid emerald, while its match was upon the little finger of his left hand. In sleeve-buttons were other emeralds, in his knife-hilt, revolver butts, and in the massive gold buckle of his belt, which represented a human eye, were like gems of rare size and beauty, hence the name given him of Emerald Ed.

Such was the man who was the master of the most popular resort of the settlement, and which was properly named Devil's Acre, for what scenes of death, and despair and crime had not those log walls encompassed.

CHAPTER XI.

A SLIP OF PAPER.

It was the night when Buffalo Bill and his party had tracked out the hiding-place of Madge, the kidnapped heiress, and discovered her in the house of Dandy Dan, the former companion of the man known as Don Eduardo Vincente, and proven to be the Deserter Captain.

Alleged to be guiltless of the knowledge that he was the Deserter Captain, for so the outlaw chief had asserted, Dandy Dan had been allowed to return to the settlement to be soon after discovered as still the ally of the man whom he had before served, and to become the jailer of the fair young captive.

The capture of Dandy Dan and the release of the captive had taken place quietly, and yet soon after had Too Slick the giant Chinnee appeared in Devil's Acre and gone at once to the faro-table where Keno Kate presided.

He placed a roll of bills upon a card and lost.

Then he turned away for smaller game, while the beautiful gambler took up the bills, unrolled them and seemed to be regarding the amounts.

Instead, she had discovered in them a small slip of paper which she found had writing upon it.

Her face slightly changed color as she read what was written there, and a moment after she called to a man near and said:

"Sandy, please ask Emerald Ed to come here, and to bring me some small bills for large ones."

The young man seemed pleased to do the errand for the fair gambler, and soon after Emerald Ed sauntered up to the Faro Fairy's throne.

"Please take these three one hundreds and give me smaller bills," said the Faro Fairy, sweetly.

She thrust into the hand of Emerald Ed, as she spoke, the three bills.

He glanced at them carefully and cautiously, his face slightly changing color as he saw the little slip of white paper there, and the glance told its purport.

Then he handed over a roll of smaller bills, with the remark:

"Count them, Keno Kate, for I do not know what is there."

With this he walked away, and soon after took a seat at his desk, behind the solid log bar.

Then he took out his three bills, and now read carefully the slip of paper.

What he read caused him to start, thrust the money into his pocket, along with more which he took from his cash-drawer in the desk.

"Buck, I do not feel just well, so you look after the den, as I am going to my cabin to retire," he said, in a quiet way, and at once left the hall by the rear door.

He had not been gone five minutes before Too Slick, the Chinnee, concluded that luck was against him that night too decidedly for him to risk more, and so followed his master out of the Devil's Acre.

Whether Keno Kate also suffered from indisposition or not, half an hour after Emerald Ed's departure, she too arose and retired from the saloon.

But as she was wont to do as she pleased, no one thought anything of her action in retiring.

The gambler, meanwhile, had retreated to his cabin, and began to pace up and down the rooms.

The cabin was roomy and comfortably furnished, consisting of three rooms, and built against the cliff.

There was a front sitting-room, and a bed-chamber in the rear.

The rooms opposite were a dining-room and kitchen, and Too Slick's humble quarters.

A guitar, cornet and flute were hanging on the wall in the gambler's sitting-room, and there were shelves of books, and several fine paintings, with rustic frames, and some pencil sketches.

There were half a dozen rifles in a stand, some revolvers and a pair of foils, with boxing-gloves and Indian clubs for exercise.

Though he had no visitors, or was never known to have any, there were two easy-chairs in the sitting-room, a dressing-gown thrown across one, and slippers near at hand.

The door between the rooms was open, and the man walked to and fro from one to the other.

His brow was clouded now, and he seemed a trifle nervous, for he stopped constantly, as though listening, or waiting for some one.

Soon the door opened, and in stepped Too Slick, the Chinnee.

"Well, what is all this, for I read what you gave Keno Kate?" asked Emerald Ed, quickly.

"Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell and more takee Dandy Dan cabin and find girlee there."

"When?"

"One hour."

"One hour ago?"

"Samee."

"Was Dandy Dan killed?"

"He takee off to guardee-house."

"And they found the captive?"

"Oh, yes."

"And who is at the cabin?"

"Two scoutee."

"Too Slick."

"Allee lightee."

"That cabin must be set on fire."

"Oh, yes."

"To-night."

"Oh, yes."

"Go and burn it down."

"Allee lightee."

With this the Chinnee went into the other room and got a box of matches, a bottle of kerosene oil and some paper.

Then he returned to the sitting-room, and said:

"Allee ready."

"Then go, and make no mistake."

"Too Slick no foollee," was the smiling reply, and he went to the bed that stood against the rear wall.

This he pushed aside, and catching hold of one of the logs he gave it a strong pull, when two of them came out at one end, as though on hinges, revealing an opening amply large enough for him to pass through.

Into this space he went, pulling the logs back into place again from within, Emerald Ed meanwhile continuing his walk, and paying no attention to what the Chinnee did.

CHAPTER XII.

A HIDDEN SECRET.

AFTER the departure of the Chinaman, by the secret passageway in the wall of the cabin, Emerald Ed continued his steady walk from room to room.

His face still wore the look of anxiety and he started as he heard a sound upon the logs, a gentle tapping.

"Come!"

In answer to his call the logs swung outward once more and a form slipped into the room.

It was Keno Kate, dressed in the same elegant costume which she wore in the gambling saloon of Devil's Acre.

She came into the room without a word and dropped down into one of the easy-chairs.

"Well, you know that the Don's cabin was raided?" said Emerald Ed impatiently.

"Did I not give you the slip of paper containing the news?"

"Yes, and the Chinaman gave it to you."

"He did."

"But where is he?"

"Gone to burn the cabin."

"Ah! it is a wise precaution, for it will hide the secret that must not be known."

"It will completely hide it; but the captive was rescued."

"I am not sorry."

"What?" and the man's face flushed with anger.

"I am not sorry, for it was dangerous work to keep the girl there."

"Who rescued her?"

"Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill."

"Of course, they will track a shadow, those two."

"They are dangerous men."

"But Dandy Dan was captured."

"Alive?"

"Yes."

"That will not do."

"Why?"

"He is true as steel as long as he is safe; but he will tell anything to save his life."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

"What is to be done then?"

"The Chinnee has gone to set fire to the house?"

"Yes."

"Then when he returns let him do other work."

"What is it?"

"The man must not be allowed to talk."

"How can it be helped?"

"Death will silence lips," was the significant response.

"Would you have Too Slick kill the man?"

"Of course, why not?"

"It would be safest."

"It will be the only thing to be done."

"If it can be done?"

"Why cannot it be?"

"All care must be exerted now, for a mistake may ruin all."

"Very true, but boldness will win, too."

"Will you return to the saloon this evening?"

"Not I, for I have had quite a shock by this affair, and I shall remain here."

"It is safest; but you can congratulate yourself that that other man, Dandy Dan, was not found at the cabin."

"True, but all may not yet be safe—ah! see the glare of the light without."

"Yes, Too Slick has done his work."

Hardly had the words been uttered when the logs were again swung out, and the Chinaman reappeared.

"Allee lightee," he said, with a smile.

"The cabin is on fire!"

"Oh, yes, him hotee."

"Did you see any one?"

"See two 'Melican man."

"They not see Too Slick."

"It is well; but you had better go to the fire."

"Oh, yes, maybe good time lookee at fire," and the Chinaman again disappeared, this time through the cabin door.

The man and the woman sat in silence for some minutes, and then Keno Kate said:

"What is your intention now, Ed?"

"What do you mean?"

"That girl must not be again a captive."

"Why not?"

"It is dangerous."

"No harm is done her."

"I do not mean for the girl."

"Who, then?"

"For yourself."

"I cannot comprehend your meaning."

"I will be so explicit you cannot fail to understand."

"Pray do so."

"It is dangerous for you, as she is one to love."

"Bah! a child."

"A child, yet a woman."

"You know that half the men at the fort are in love with her now."

"It may be, but surely you do not doubt me?"

"I trust no man."

"You are complimentary to my sex."

"I know them."

"You should not judge us all as alike."

"I do, though; but about this girl?"

"Well?"

"She must not be captured again?"

"Why not?"

"I wish it so, that is all."

"Do you know what will be thrown away through your foolish jealousy?"

"Nothing, for a like sum can be gotten in another way."

"How?"

"By the capture of Lord Lonsfield."

"It can not be done."

"Why not?"

"He is a man, a brave one too, and it will be no easy task to make him a prisoner, or to hold and hide him after he is a captive."

"If there is to be gold gotten as you expect, it must be through his capture not the girls?"

"Why do you seek the greatest danger in capturing him, rather than the girl?"

"Because, as I said, the girl is too dangerous a captive to trust you with, and besides, I wish my revenge upon that man."

"What have you against him?"

"When he came to Devil's Acre with Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill you know that he played with me and caught me cheating, so forced me to give back the money I had won."

"So you told me; but he not expose you?"

"No, for some reason he did not; but I hate him and wish to punish him."

"Well, as you usually have your way I suppose, if a ransom is to be gotten it must be the nobleman not the girl that is to be taken," said Emerald Ed, petulantly.

"It must be so."

"Now good-night," and the woman left the cabin by the way she had come, and not bearing the bitter oath hurled after her by Emerald Ed, followed by the words:

"She too is becoming dangerous, and I almost begin to fear her."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN DREAD.

THE rescue of Madge Burton from the power of her captor created a sensation in Fort Beauvoir and the settlement, and especially when it became known that she had been found in the cabin that had been the home of Don Eduardo Vincente.

Her rescue had been followed by the death of her jailer, Dandy Dan, and the burning down of the cabin.

How the cabin had caught on fire was a mystery to all, for there were only the two guards in charge and they reported that the flames suddenly sprung up in the rear rooms and were under full headway before they could hardly realize that there was a fire.

The alarm was given and men from the settlement and soldiers from the fort had hastened to the scene, but in vain were their efforts to save the cabin, for soon it was but a mass of blazing logs.

Thus was wiped out the house of the Mexican Don and many were glad that it was so, knowing the true history of its owner.

But where was the Deserter Captain?

That question was asked upon all sides, with no one to answer it satisfactorily.

Could it be that he had been hidden away in the cabin and had perished in the flames?

The fate would have been none too severe, many thought, for such a man.

But there were those who felt sure that a man who had passed through all that he had was not one to be caught in such a trap.

"His band is wiped out, his cabin burned, he is a fugitive, but we will hear from him again, mark my words," said Bessie Bond to Madge Burton one day as the two sat together in the home of the chaplain.

They had become the warmest friends of late, and Bessie, though but several years older than

Madge, had appeared to feel that she was her especial guardian.

"So Surgeon Powell said only last night," answered Madge.

"And Surgeon Powell knows the man," was the earnest rejoinder of Bessie Bond.

"As you do, Bessie?" came the pointed response.

"Yes, Madge, as I do, for I have had reason to know him, and though he may be now hiding for his life, he is one to dread even alone, for he is fearless, desperate, scheming and revengeful.

"He played a bold game here in the fort as Don Eduardo Vincente, a Mexican gentleman, while he was secretly the outlaw leader, the Deserter Captain.

"When his hand was captured or killed, and he was looked upon as powerless for further harm, he appeared at the head of a band of Sioux and made you a captive, taking you into the very shadow of the fort to conceal you.

"Then, when you were rescued, and his ally was taken, he quietly slipped away and is now at large to be guilty of further acts of evil.

"Yes, Madge, you must beware of that man, for as long as he is not dead he is to be dreaded," and Bessie Bond spoke with deep earnestness.

The rescue of Madge, the Daughter of the Regiment, created a sensation in the fort, especially when it was known that during all the search for her she had been within a stone's throw of the stockade walls.

Her rescuers came in for all the praise that could be bestowed upon them, and it was now believed that her captor, deprived as he was of all power and a fugitive, was no longer dangerous, and all felt relieved at the thought.

There were, however, several who still dreaded evil at the hands of the man who was still at large.

One of these was Buffalo Bill, another was Surgeon Frank Powell.

Seated in his quarters some time after the rescue and the burning of the cabin, Surgeon Powell had received a visit from Buffalo Bill, for the two were devoted friends.

"Doc, I have come to have a little chat with you," the chief of scouts had said.

"Yes, Bill, fire away."

"It is about the Deserter Captain."

"Yes, you think he is still dangerous?"

"I know that he is."

"Anything new, Bill?"

"Well no, and yet I cannot get it out of my head that he is concealed about the settlement somewhere."

"Bill, it is a coincidence, but I have had the same idea."

"You know that he must have some friends in the settlement, if not in the fort."

"Very true."

"If he has, then he is well able to do mischief yet, and if able he will."

"There is no doubt of that, Bill; but when will his blow fall next?"

"That is just what I would like to know, Frank."

"But the truth is he has the greatest influence in the Sioux tribe, and as he cannot strike with a small force now, he may bring down upon the fort a thousand or more warriors and do no end of deviltry."

"That is so, and it will be well to send out a scouting party to see if there is any movement among the Indians of a threatening nature."

"So I think, Doc, and I will start to-morrow with a dozen scouts, while you keep your eyes open upon all that goes on about the fort and the settlement."

"I will do so, and I'll take a look in about Devil's Acre now and then to see if there are any suspicious signs in that quarter, for, though I may wrong him, Bill, I begin to feel that Emerald Ed or that strange woman Keno Kate, were better friends with that outlaw than they are willing to admit."

"It may be so, and it would be as well to watch them, without their suspecting it."

"But will you ride over and put those at Ranch Isle on their guard, as the blow may fall there first; but I must go and detail my men to go with me, as I shall make an early start," and Buffalo Bill returned to his own quarters, leaving the Surgeon Scout once more alone.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MEXICAN GUIDE.

IF Captain Alvarez was alarmed at the position he found himself in through the treachery of his cousin, the lieutenant, he did not reveal the fact in his face or actions.

He ate heartily of the meals prepared for him by Red Robin, wrapped himself in his blankets at night when camping, and admired the scenery openly when on the trail by day.

The Mexican lieutenant, acting as guide and leader of the expedition, laid his plans well to avoid any of the mining-camps or the ranches, for he felt that if they met a party of miners or cowboys, and Captain Alvarez claimed to be an American, being dragged into Mexico against his will, his perfect English and appearance would carry out the belief, and cause a rescue to be made.

He explained this to Red Robin and the others,

and they too were anxious not to meet any one on the southward trail.

They had even in their evil hearts a certain sympathy for the captain, but then his loss of life was to be their gain, and they would not show it to their detriment.

They therefore took a trail which would lead them into Mexico between Fronteras and Janos, so that they could then push on to Chihuahua, near which place was stationed the military commander into whose hands the prisoners were to have been delivered, according to the orders of the Deserter Captain to the sergeant, and which orders the four outlaws had taken from the man who would not carry out the commands of his chief.

The Mexican lieutenant gave a sigh of great relief, when he crossed the border line of Mexico, for then he had nothing more to dread of the Americans.

He watched the face of his cousin for some sign of fear, but saw none, and so said:

"Well, Senor Captain, we are in Mexico at last?"

"Yes."

"Crossing the boundary line has caused you to yield up every hope."

"I had no hope to yield up."

"You certainly had hope of a rescue by the Americans before we reached Mexico."

"Oh, no, I did not, for had I wished to cause bloodshed, by asking others to risk their lives to rescue me, you will I believe admit that in half a dozen instances I could have, by a loud call, brought people to my aid."

"I half expected that you would do so."

"No, you did not know me to think I would have others suffer to serve me."

"I really believe that you do not expect me to give you up?"

"Oh, yes, I do, Leon, for I expect you to do anything you have a mind to accomplish of an evil nature."

"Well, I shall give you up, and I will carry out my compact with these men."

"I do not believe it."

"What?"

"I do not believe that you intend to keep faith with them."

"Why not?"

"Well, it will be a case of dog eat dog, for having accomplished your end in getting me into Mexico, you will simply see that you get the reward for my head, and that the poor outlaws are properly cared for for life."

"You believe me as black as that?"

"I do, and did I wish to be revengeful I could raise a merry row about your ears by the suggestion."

"You wrong me, Alvarez, indeed, you do," said the lieutenant, in an injured tone.

Captain Alvarez laughed, but made no reply, and the subject was not spoken of again.

When the party were on the way in Mexico, Red Robin and his men quickly realized that without the Mexican officer they could have never made their way with their two prisoners in an unknown land and unfamiliar with the language.

They were halted time and again by Mexican patrol, and also by soldiers, and each time the lieutenant had responded:

"I am Lieutenant Alva Luiz of the army, returning with an officer deserter captured in the United States, and en route to General Garza at Chihuahua."

This was sufficient, and the party passed on with the Mexican captain in irons, for he made no contradictory statement in his own behalf.

The lieutenant-guide so directed his way and time that he might arrive at the Mexican military post at night, for he had his reasons for so doing.

He left his party at a ranch several leagues from the post, with orders for Red Robin to await his return there, for he was going to see the commandante alone, and see what disposition he would make of the prisoner.

It was after nightfall when he reached the military headquarters and sent in the name of "Lieutenant Alva Luiz" to the commandante, with the request for a private interview with him upon a matter of very great moment.

The Mexican Governor-General of the State was enjoying an after dinner smoke and was alone, so bade the orderly admit the visitor.

He was a stern-faced man of forty-five, dressed in uniform, and all about him indicated that he was one who was anxious to enjoy the luxuries of life after the arduous campaign he had passed through.

He looked up quickly as his visitor entered and rose politely to receive him, motioning him to a chair after greeting him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRICE OF A LIFE.

LEON ALVAREZ was strangely nervous as he faced the stern commander, and his face was very pale, so that it was at once observed.

"You appear disturbed, senor."

"Have a glass of wine and tell me how I can serve you," and the general pushed the decanter on the table at his elbow toward his guest.

"I have just gone through a very severe ex-

perience lasting for months, Senor General, and it is the reaction I suspect that unnerves me."

With this the lieutenant bowed his compliments to the general as he drank the glass of wine.

"Now, senor?"

Alvarez bowed and said:

"I come, Senor General, upon a duty of importance and secrecy, and you will pardon me if I question you, that I may, in understanding the situation, have you also perfectly comprehend it."

The general inclined his head, and the lieutenant continued:

"You remember the case, senor, of Captain Leon Luiz Alvarez, the conspirator?"

"Perfectly."

"You deemed him guilty, senor?"

"He was proven to be so at his trial."

"And executed?"

"He was sentenced to be executed, yet it is shown now that he escaped."

"May I ask in what way?"

"He was wounded severely, and rendered unconscious by the platoon fire, for he was buried.

"But some American friends of his reopened the grave, and he was found to be alive."

"Taken to a skilled surgeon in Texas he was revived, and eventually recovered."

"This is known to the Government, Senor General?"

"It is."

"And a reward has been offered for his recapture, I believe?"

"Yes: twenty thousand pesos have been placed in my hands as a reward for his recapture."

"I thank you, senor, and I suppose that he will be at once executed?"

"He will, if retaken, be placed in my hands for execution, for such are the orders from the City of Mexico."

"And you will pay the reward to one placing him in your hands?"

"I will at once obey my orders and do so."

"Do you know aught of Captain Alvarez?"

"I do, sir."

"May I ask if you are acquainted with him?"

"I never met him in my life, senor."

"Now, Senor General, I would inquire of one other."

"Yes."

"You were not in command at the time of the Conspirator Captain's trial?"

"I was not, for I was in the field with my command over on the Rio Grande."

"You know a Texan by the name of Edward Vincent?"

"Yes, I know him well, or did."

"Where is he?"

"Upon the northwest border of the States, and he bade me remember him to you."

"Thank you; but I heard that he had had some trouble with his Government in Texas."

"I do not know, senor, as to that; but he it was who bade me seek you and that you would give me all necessary information regarding the Conspirator Captain."

"I have done so."

"Thanks, Senor General."

"But, do you recall the cousin of Captain Alvarez?"

"I never met him, if you mean Lieutenant Alvarez, whose name was the same as the captain's."

"I mean Lieutenant Alvarez, senor, who was suspected of being an ally of his cousin, but for want of proof was sent to prison instead of to execution."

"And escaped?"

"Yes, senor; but I believe there is a reward offered for him too?"

"There is, but one of five thousand pesos; in fact the Government, I believe, decided that no real proof of his guilt was shown, and the real claim now against him is desertion, as he escaped before he had been dismissed from the service."

"But you will pay the reward for his delivery to you, senor?"

"I will."

"Now, senor, another point?"

"Well?"

"The story about the Conspirator Captain's escape is believed, is it not?"

"Certainly."

"It is not true."

"Ha!"

"I can tell you that if you will pardon Lieutenant Alvarez for what he was accused of doing, and his escape from prison, that I can place in your hands proof that two of the officers were guilty of treachery to the Government and aided Captain Alvarez to escape."

"You can prove this?"

"I can, senor."

"And these officers are now in the service?"

"Under your command, senor."

"Do this and you shall have the pardon for Lieutenant Alvarez you ask for."

"Write the pardon, Senor General, now, and I will give you the proof."

The general turned to his table, looked over some papers, selected one and wrote a few lines, stamping it with the seal of Mexico after signing his name.

"Now, Senor General, let me just say that the Texan, Edward Vincent, held Captain, now Major Sebastian, in his power in some way, and forced him to have the muskets to be used in the execution of Alvarez loaded only with powder.

"And more, the surgeon who was to pronounce him to be dead was also forced into the secret to square gambling debts he owed to Edward Vincent the Texan.

"The Texan was on hand to get the supposed dead man, and aided him in his escape."

"You know this?"

"I do, senor, and I know that the Texan did what he was guilty of to try and win the love of a lady, the Senorita Bessie Norcross, as she was then known, but who is now known by her mother's maiden name of Bond, and who was engaged to Captain Alvarez.

"With the captain out of the way, through his act, the Texan hoped the young lady would marry him; but if she promised to do so, she fled to avoid him, and so changed her name and sought a home elsewhere."

"This is remarkable indeed, senor."

"It is the truth, senor, for I was the fellow-miner of young Noel Norcross for a long time in New Mexico, and he was my fellow-prisoner and escaped with me, for I am Lieutenant Alvarez, Senor General."

CHAPTER XV.

THE REPORT.

THE governor-general was fairly startled at the confession of the man before him.

In an instant then it flashed upon him just how he had been trapped into giving Lieutenant Alvarez a pardon, and he looked at the man in a way that showed that he read him.

"So you are Alvarez, ex-lieutenant of infantry in the Mexican Army, are you?"

"I am, senor."

"I recall that an American known as Noel Norcross, and suspected of being a conspirator, from information furnished by the Texan, Edward Vincent, was arrested and placed in prison, escaped with you."

"Yes, senor, he did, and reaching New Mexico, we went to mining there."

"Norcross was killed from ambush, and that very day Captain Alvarez came to the cabin, having wandered about after his escape until that time."

"We buried Norcross, who, before he died, bade us seek his mother and sister, and tell them of his death."

"We did so, and from Captain Alvarez and the Senorita Bond I learned of the escape of my cousin."

"As I discovered that my cousin was going to plot another conspiracy, I entrapped him, with the aid of four American, and brought him into Mexico."

"Having been falsely accused of conspiracy, I still wished to serve my country, and so bring to you the Captain Conspirator, Senor General, and deliver myself also into your charge."

"But I claim for those four Americans who aided me in the capture of the conspirator, the reward offered for him, and for myself."

"They are entitled to it, sir; but where is Captain Alvarez?"

"I will deliver him to you to-morrow night, senor, at this hour, and ask only for myself the pardon you have written for me."

"Then I will keep my pledge to see those men safely back to their country, when I will return and live down the dishonor that has fallen upon me as an alleged conspirator."

"This, at least, is praiseworthy in you; but this man whom you deliver to me is your kinsman?"

"He is, senor."

"And your motive?"

"He is a conspirator."

"Then love of your country prompts the act upon your part?"

"That alone, senor."

"Well, senor, when you deliver to me Captain Alvarez, the conspirator, your pardon and the reward I will give to you, as well as the sum offered for your own capture."

"Thank you, Senor General."

"Shall I bring the four Americans with me?"

"As you please."

With this the Mexican lieutenant left the quarters of the general, who at once sprung to his feet and began to pace to and fro, as though considerably moved by what he had heard.

Back to the camp of the four Americans with their prisoner went Alvarez, and he was glad to find the latter safe; for, treacherous himself, he had dreaded treachery on the part of those who had his cousin in charge.

"Well, men, I have seen the governor-general."

"Yes, Pard Lieutenant."

"And to-morrow night we take the captain into the post to deliver him up."

"And the reward, sir?" asked Red Robin.

"I'll tell you what I did."

All anxiously waited to hear.

"I did not say who I was until I had had a talk with the general, and learned that he would pay cash the reward of twenty thousand pesos for Captain Alvarez."

"That's good."

"And then I asked him about the reward on my head and he said five thousand pesos."

"That's fine."

"I then got the promise of a pardon for myself, for giving the information about the officers who aided the escape of Captain Alvarez from death."

"When this was done, and it was arranged that you should go in safety out of the country, I acting as your guide, I told him who I was."

"He was surprised of course; but I got my pardon and you get the money, for I turn mine over to you too."

"That's downright square, pard; but what does you get?"

"My revenge," was the savage response of the Mexican.

"Waal, I like revenge heaps, but money goes further in my case."

"Now, pard, we is ready when you says ther word," and Red Robin was very much delighted at the prospect of dividing twenty-five thousand pesos by four on the following night.

Going to where the prisoner was reclining upon his blankets the lieutenant said:

"Well, captain, I have seen the governor-general."

"Yes."

"I told him that I would deliver you to him to-morrow night."

"And get your reward?"

"That goes to the men."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I have some money, as you know—"

"And what you took from me."

"That the men have."

"Ah, yes."

"I will get my pardon, for it is written, for you know that I had nothing to do with the conspiracy."

"I know that you were plotting conspiracy, and that I was made to suffer for it."

"But never mind now."

"I told the general also that I would give him the name of the captain and surgeon who conspired at your escape from death."

"Leon Alvarez, that is the meanest act of your contemptible life, for I told you that in confidence, giving you no names, though you have discovered who they were."

"I despise you, as one unworthy of just indignation," and the captain's words rung out clear and stern.

"Have a care, for you are in my power and I may kill you."

"Oh, no, you would not throw away twenty thousand pesos," was the stinging retort of the Mexican captain.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PRISONER.

THE governor-general was again enjoying his after-dinner cigar, and sipping his glass of wine, when the name of Lieutenant Alva Luiz was brought in by the orderly.

"Is he alone?"

"No, senor, there are five others with him, four Americans and one a Mexican in irons."

"Ask the lieutenant to first enter alone."

"Yes, senor."

The orderly delivered his orders and a moment after the lieutenant stood before the general, who greeted him with a cold bow.

"You are on time, senor."

"I am, Senor General."

"You have your prisoner?"

"He is without, senor."

"And those who aided you to capture him?"

"Are with him, Senor General."

"I have here the money for the reward of Captain Alvarez and yourself."

"Yes, senor."

"And your pardon."

"I thank you, senor."

"I have a statement here for you to sign."

The lieutenant glanced over the paper handed to him by the general and saw that it was an accusation against the captain and surgeon, in charge of the execution of Captain Alvarez, conspirator, of having, for reasons of fear or bribery brought to bear upon them, aided the escape of the condemned officer from death.

"You will sign this, senor?"

"I will, Senor General."

"Do so."

The signature was written upon the paper.

"Now what is your intention, senor?"

"To conduct these men back to their own territory, Senor General."

"And then?"

"To return to Mexico, senor, and endeavor to live down the disgrace against my name."

"Well, I will wish you to return at once, for I may need you to appear against Captain Alvarez and the two officers whom you accuse of treachery to the Government."

"I will grant you leave of one month, Senor Alvarez, and you are not to speak of the capture of Captain Alvarez to any one."

"Yes, senor, it shall be as you desire."

"Now bring in your prisoner and his guard of Americans."

The officer at once left the room, but soon returned with Captain Alvarez by his side and

the four Americans following close upon their heels.

The doomed man was in irons, but walked erect and without fear.

The four Americans were a trifle nervous at the presence they found themselves in.

The general arose and his eyes met those of the captain.

Both men started and the general turned pale, while the face of the young man flushed.

The Americans bowed and all stood still in the presence of the man who held the power to put Captain Alvarez to death within the hour, if so he pleased.

"You are Captain Leon Luiz Alvarez, the conspirator?" said the general.

"I am Leon Luiz Alvarez, Senor General, an ex-captain of Lanceros, but not a conspirator."

"You were so proven at your trial."

"By false witnesses and circumstantial evidence, yes, senor; but I am no conspirator, no traitor."

"You were doomed to execution."

"Yes, Senor General."

"But escaped?"

"I regret to say that I did, senor."

"Regret to say it?"

"Yes, senor."

"And why?"

"A dishonored officer I have no desire to live."

"Ah! but who aided you in your escape?"

"An American, senor, a Texan."

"Who else?"

"If there were others, senor, I have no right to give their names, nor will I."

"Suppose a pardon were offered you to do so?"

"I would refuse, senor."

"And your rank of captain returned to you, with dishonor effaced from your name?"

"The dishonor would never be effaced, Senor General, did I betray those who, whatever their motive, saved my life."

"Well and nobly said!" cried the general as though thinking aloud.

But, he added quickly:

"But have you no proof that you were innocent of conspiracy?"

"Only the word of a soldier, sir, a word that was never broken," was the proud rejoinder.

"And I believe yer, durned ef I don't!" abruptly said Red Robin.

The general looked quickly at him, and Red Robin said:

"Pardon, general, I forgot whar I be."

"No harm done, senor," was the courteous reply.

"I believe, Captain Alvarez, that you are the cousin of Lieutenant Alvarez here."

"Yes, senor."

"What motive can he have for having brought you here a prisoner to die?"

"He can best answer the question, Senor General."

"Have you any charge to make against him?"

"None, senor."

"Well, Captain Alvarez—"

"Pardon, senor, but I am plain Senor Alvarez."

"You are mistaken, for you were Captain Alvarez when sentenced, and as you did not die the rank is still yours until you are dismissed from the service or executed."

Captain Alvarez bowed and then the general continued:

"Well, senor, there is a reward of twenty thousand pesos offered for your capture, and I wish to ask you who are your captors?"

"These four men, Senor General."

"And for Senor Alvarez there is a reward of five thousand pesos?"

"Yes, senor, and they are entitled to that also, for they captured both of us."

"Ah!"

"We were together, and these men made us prisoners, and Senor Alvarez was set free to bring me here to Mexico, Senor General."

"Well, senors, I will pay into your hands the two rewards, and Senor Alvarez will guide you in safety back to your country."

"As for you, Captain Alvarez, I must place you under guard," and the orderly was called, a file of soldiers were sent for and the doomed man marched away.

Then the four Americans received their pay in equal parts, and were dismissed, the general saying simply:

"In one month, remember, Senor Alvarez, you are to report here to me."

CHAPTER XVII.

DOUBLE TREACHERY.

"Yes, Senor General, in one month I will report to you," was the reply of the Senor Alvarez in response to the words of his superior.

But below his breath he muttered:

"Never again."

He had seen his cousin led away to a cell without a sign of remorse, and had caught the eye of the captain-general upon him.

Then he had seen the money divided into four equal parts and paid over to the Americans.

With a salute he had left the quarters of the general, followed by the four outlaws, who were

profuse in their thanks for the gold paid to them.

Out of the post they had gone, back to their camp, but not to halt, for the Mexican guide seemed anxious to press on to another camping-place.

This was done, and not until dawn came did they halt.

So they continued on their way back along the trail they had come, the Mexican showing the greatest anxiety all the time to keep from meeting any one, and avoiding the ranches as much as possible.

He had laid in a most generous supply of provisions, had his goods carried on two pack-horses, and seemed determined to enjoy the travel back as best he could.

He was in cheerful mood, and the men began to feel that he had little or no conscience not to feel remorse for his cousin, whom all of them had taken a great fancy to, while they did not like the lieutenant.

But the Mexican had kept faith with them, had guided them safely through his country, had taken them into the presence of the governor-general, and they had received their reward, for Captain Alvarez, as well as the lesser one offered for the lieutenant.

This was generous, at least in him, to turn over his reward to them, and so he had won their confidence.

At last the boundary line was reached, and just before sunset.

"I will not cross the line, men, but as it is late, will go into camp with you here, and we part company early in the morning, for you know that I have to be back in time to report to the governor-general," said the Mexican.

"Yes, and he don't look like a man ter fool with."

"Maybe he might make it hot for you, pard, after all."

"No, I have his pardon, and that is all I care for."

"I will have to give my testimony to the Government, I suppose, and then I will be free to do as I please."

"Now what will you do?"

"Waal, as we has struck it rich in ther rewards, and we hain't gittin' rich in the outlaw biz, I'm a-thinkin' I'll turn honest, and invest my dust somewhar in the West," said Red Robin.

"Me too," another added, while the third and fourth men boldly asserted that they intended to "blow in" their money, having a good time, and when it was gone they would hustle around for more.

The camp chosen for the night was some distance off the trail and a secluded spot at the head of a canyon.

There was a rivulet of clear water, with grassy banks, and plenty of wood for fires.

"Men, I've got a little good liquor here, so we'll have a good time after supper," the Mexican said.

In anticipation of the "good time" the four outlaws gathered around the camp-fire and the Mexican uncorked the bottle and poured out a liberal quantity of liquor into each tin cup held out to receive it.

"Here's luck, men," he said, and the liquor was dashed off with a gusto by the four men.

Soon the drinks were repeated and the Mexican said that he would retire to his blankets.

This he did and for a long while he lay there as still as though sleeping quietly.

The men had chatted a while, then the sound of their voices had died away.

Suddenly the Mexican looked up and saw that two of the men had gone to their blankets, a third had fallen from the log and lay near the fire and the fourth was seated with bowed head and motionless.

Noiselessly the Mexican arose, and, revolver in hand, went toward the bent form.

It was that of Red Robin, and he appeared to be fast asleep.

Softly the Mexican shook him, but, as there was no movement, no response, he placed his hands about his waist and unbuckled the belt heavy with gold.

Then the pockets were searched thoroughly, and the things of value found all placed on a serape spread to receive them.

The Mexican worked quickly, but thoroughly, and went from man to man, robbing each one of his belt of gold and his valuables.

Then two horses were saddled, his own and a pack-animal, and the stolen booty was loaded into the pack-saddle.

The bottle of liquor, or rather it was empty now, was left before the fire, and an appearance was given to the men and camp as though the party had just gotten drunk, and had not been robbed, for the horses of the four men and one pack-animal were left staked out as their owners had placed them.

Mounting his horse, and taking the pack-animal in lead, the Mexican rode away from the spot, turning into the rivulet to destroy all trace of his trail.

He halted, when about to lose sight of the camp, and looked back, while, as he rode on again he muttered:

"Now the game I played to win is won!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SURVIVOR.

THE camp-fire flickered almost out, leaving only a glow, and yet the men moved not.

At last Red Robin, away after midnight, aroused himself with a start, and springing to his feet, fell heavily.

He half-raised himself again, and gazed about him.

Then his hand was pressed hard against his head, and he said faintly:

"What does it mean? I can't collect my thoughts."

Down dropped his head again, and for a long while he remained once more still.

But again he roused himself, pressed his hand to his head and then rose to his feet, but to fall again.

"My God! I believe I am dying," he cried, hoarsely.

On hands and knees then he crept until he reached the rivulet, and stooping low he took a long drink of the cool waters.

Then he bathed his face and head for a long time, and at last was able to rise to his feet.

But he staggered as he walked back to the camp-fire and threw more wood on the glowing coals.

A bright flame soon shot up and revealed his nearest comrade lying by the fire.

At once he went to him and shook him.

"Sandy, pard, wake up, for I want you."

But he shook in vain.

The form moved not.

As he twisted it around in his endeavor to arouse the man, he saw that the form retained its bent position.

Then he felt the pulse and dropped his head upon the breast.

"Great God! he is dead!"

"Yes, that Mexican officer has poisoned us!" cried Red Robin, in a tone of horror, as he knelt by the side of his companion.

He seemed almost overwhelmed for a moment, and then murmured:

"Yes, I will soon know the truth."

He ran to where he had seen the Mexican spread his blankets, to discover that they were gone.

He next ran to the bed of the two men who had sought rest.

There they lay, as still as death!

"They are also dead!"

He fairly shouted the words, and then rushed to where the horses were staked out.

"The pack-horse with his things, and his own horse are gone. It is all plain now: he sought to kill us all."

He suddenly felt at his waist and uttered a cry like an enraged beast.

"My gold is gone!"

Quickly he rushed to the bodies of the others, and a search revealed the fact that they had also been robbed.

"The pack-saddle has been rifled, all of our valuables and gold have been taken, and he has gone."

"Fortunately I did not drink so deep as the others, or I would have died too, and now I remember that he upset his cup once, and the next time could not have put liquor in it, though pretending to do so."

"Oh! but what a vile wretch he is!"

"How different from the noble man we took to die, while he escaped."

"This is awful!" and seating himself upon the log he buried his face in his hands and shook with emotion.

He was completely overcome with grief, and it was a long time before he could control himself and act.

Then he threw more wood upon the fire, got the bodies of his three dead comrades together, and wrapping each in a blanket, began to dig a large grave with a hatchet which he took from the pack-saddle.

He worked diligently, and the sun rose and found him just ready to bury the dead.

It revealed too, his face white and haggard, his eyes glaring, and lips set with fierce determination.

The three bodies were at last placed in the grave, the dirt thrown in and rocks and bushes piled on top to keep the wolves from tearing up the dead.

The horses were then saddled, the pack-saddle looked over, and the man was glad to find that he was, at least, well supplied with provisions.

"I cannot bear to remain in this camp, and yet I need rest."

"I will go elsewhere and rest, and then take his trail, for I am determined to track him down."

One who saw the face and heard the words of Red Robin, would feel that he made no idle threat.

So he took his horses in lead, and with a pathetic wave of his hand to the triple grave where lay his companions he rode away.

Some two miles he went and then found a good camping-place.

He felt very weak and wretched, and he saw that a storm was coming up.

Quickly, he threw up a brush shelter, staked out his horses, spread his blankets and laid down to rest.

So sound did he sleep, that the storm of wind and rain did not awaken him, and when at last he did arouse himself from his deep slumber, night was coming on.

Hastily he kindled a fire and cooked his supper, and again sought rest.

In the morning all trails were washed away, and he said:

"I can only go back to the governor-general, and tell him all."

"There will I find him."

CHAPTER XIX.

HALF-BREED HARRY RECEIVES A LETTER.

AT the request of Bessie Bond, Surgeon Frank Powell of Fort Beauvoir had picked out for Isle Ranch a number of men whom he had confidence in, and who were to serve in the double capacity of cowboys and guard.

Owing to the situation of the ranch, one cowboy could have guarded the cattle, for they could not get away except through the stockade gate on the narrow neck of land.

When there came a fear that the Deserter Captain, who was known to have been a white chief of the Sioux, might make a raid upon the settlements, and especially against Ranch Isle, the men had been selected by Surgeon Powell to go to the place and report to Miss Bessie Bond.

They were a dashing, daring lot of fellows, good cattlemen and thorough plainsmen, and Bessie Bond felt that they were to be trusted the moment she looked them over.

There were at the cabin, in addition to her mother and herself, a negro man and woman who had followed their destinies.

At the stockade camp was the cowboy camp, and there, as chief, was Half-Breed Harry, who had come with them from Texas.

Why he was called Half-Breed Harry he never explained, but he had the look of a pure-blooded Mexican, though he spoke English perfectly.

About him, too, was a certain refinement of look and manner indicative of his having seen better days.

The outlaw sergeant, "Manning Mayhew," was next in command, and then came the cowboys, answering to the names of Jerry Joslyn, Derringer Dick, Angel Jim, Banjo Bob, Nebraska Joe, Idaho Ike, Bowie-Knife Ben and Mustang Mike, eight in number.

With ten such men as they were, including Half-Breed Harry and Manning Mayhew, Bessie Bond had no dread of an attack being unsuccessfully resisted, for she was a dangerous one with rifle and revolver herself, her mother was a good shot and the two negroes could be brought into requisition if need be.

The talk over the rescue of Madge Burton was dying away, the belief had become general that the Deserter Captain had concluded to leave the country, as he was capable of doing no more harm, and a feeling of security was felt by all, when one day there came a letter to the fort addressed as follows:

"TO HALF-BREED HARRY,

"RANCH ISLE,

"via Fort Beauvoir."

Bessie Bond was visiting Madge Burton at the arrival of the mail, and the letter was handed to her.

She had never known Half-Breed Harry to get a letter before and soon after she started for home, wondering what it could contain.

She always went at her will, alone, and with a fleet horse and well armed had no fear of any one.

Bessie Bond took the short cut to the ranch, through the Skeleton Gap, a canyon which was avoided by all on account of its weird history. This saved her several miles, and she reached home before sunset.

Half-Breed Harry opened the gate for her, and handing him the letter she said:

"I hope it contains no bad news, Harry."

"A letter for me, senorita?" and the man looked at the letter in amazement, while he added:

"No, senorita, it can contain no bad news as there is not a soul for me to care for."

"It is from an old comrade, Juan Sol, a soldier."

Bessie rode on to the cabin and her mother was seated upon the piazza reading.

She had hardly had time to change her habit for a house dress and join her mother when she saw Half-Breed Harry approaching.

"Mother, I got a letter at the fort for Harry, and here he comes, walking rapidly as though he had news to tell us."

The man approached in a way that was different from his usual dignified step, and his face was full of excitement.

"Senorita, the letter is from my old comrade, Juan Sol, as I thought, and he is an orderly at the quarters of General Garza."

"Read his letter, please, and see what he has to tell."

Bessie took the letter, which was written in Spanish, and read aloud as follows:

"MY DEAR OLD COMRADE:—

"From a man who has been in the States I learned your address, he having seen you at the American

fort, Beauvoir, and learned that you were chief of cowboys at a place known as Ranch Isle.

"You knew my address, yet have not written for a long while; but as soon as I know where to find you I write."

"I am, as before, orderly to the Senor General Garza, whom you may know is now the Governor of the State of — in our loved country."

"You remember that I once served under the gallant Captain Leon Alvarez of the Lasso Lancers, and that he was accused of conspiracy and sentenced to be executed."

"But he escaped being shot, through a plot of a fair senorita of Texas, I believe, aided by officers of the army and fled into the United States."

"He was believed by all to be dead, when suddenly he was brought to the Senor General's quarters a prisoner in irons, and he is now confined here in a cell."

"I cannot believe that he is guilty, and I feel deeply for the gallant captain, for of course he will be executed before many weeks."

"They were Americans who brought him here, to get a reward, and I only wish that I could aid the poor captain in his distress."

Then the letter ran on with other news, but Bessie Bond had heard enough to cause the color to leave her face and her teeth to set hard together to control her emotion.

CHAPTER XX.

A DANGEROUS RIVAL.

"Oh, mother, what does this mean?" and Bessie turned to her mother, in whose eyes were tears, for she regarded the young Mexican officer with the affection of a son, and she knew how deeply her daughter suffered also.

"My child, I cannot understand it at all," she answered.

"Where is Lieutenant Alvarez?"

"I do not know; perhaps dead."

"And Americans took him to Mexico?"

Then Bessie read the letter over again, and turning to Half-Breed Harry said:

"Do you know what it can mean, Harry, this capture of Captain Alvarez by Americans, and no word said of Lieutenant Alvarez?"

"I think I can explain, senorita," was the answer.

"Well, do so," eagerly cried Bessie.

"You recognized in the Deserter Captain your Texan lover, Senor Edward Vincent?"

"Yes."

"And he was playing the part at the fort of a Mexican gentleman, Don Eduardo Vincent?"

"I know that well, Harry; but what of his connection with this affair now?"

"You had better send for the Senor Mayhew and ask him; he can explain, senorita."

"Tell him to come here at once, please, Harry, for you will let him see your letter?"

"Of course, senorita."

"I will call him."

In a short while the half-breed returned, accompanied by Manning Mayhew, the ex-outlaw sergeant.

"Mayhew, read that letter and tell me what it means, for Harry seems to think that you can do so," said Bessie.

The man read the letter, and then asked somewhat sternly:

"How is it that you think, Half-Breed Harry, that I can explain this letter?"

"You were the commander of the four men who left here as a guard for the senora and her daughter, and they went away with the two Mexican officers, the senorita said."

"Well, sir?"

"If Americans delivered the captain up to General Garza, and Lieutenant Alvarez was not along, it would appear to me that the latter was killed and the other made prisoner by your four men."

"It may be, senorita, as Half-Breed Harry says."

"And if so, was the plot not yours, senor?" and there was a wicked look upon the face of Half-Breed Harry.

Manning Mayhew looked for an instant as though about to spring upon the half-breed, but changed his intention and said calmly:

"Can you believe such a charge against me, Miss Bond, you and your mother?"

"Under no circumstances can we, for it is utterly false."

"Do I lie, senorita?" asked the half-breed savagely.

"Do you know that Mayhew is guilty?"

"I suspect him, I believe him to be guilty, and more he is plotting against you."

"Against me?" and the beautiful eyes of Bessie Bond opened wide.

"Yes, yes, and you are too blind to see it."

"Do you not see that the man loves you and intends to force you to marry him?"

"Are you blind, girl, that you do not see that he is all that is evil, all that is treacherous?"

The half-breed spoke now with vicious earnestness.

He seemed to have lost all control of himself, and his eyes glared at Mayhew like a wild beast, while he had dropped his hand upon his knife-hilt.

Mayhew had been cleaning his weapons when the half-breed came for him, and so had laid them aside and come unarmed to the cabin.

He kept his eyes upon his accuser, and showed

no sign of fear, while a strange look came over his face, for he now recognized the fact that the half-breed loved Bessie and was jealous of her kindness to him, her trust in him.

The mother also seemed to read the truth and a pained, frightened look crossed her sadly beautiful face.

As for Bessie Bond the fact was known to her already, and she had long known it.

But never had she dared to admit by look or action that she believed that Half-Breed Harry was her lover.

True as steel to her, loving her, he could become as venomous as a snake did he believe another might claim her.

Neither Mrs. Bond or Bessie for an instant considered his accusation against Mayhew, but having uttered it, he went on rapidly to say:

"That man plotted with his four outlaw comrades to take Captain Alvarez into Mexico and give him up, for he knew that he would be executed as a conspirator, and that would free him of a dangerous rival."

"Yes, senorita, that is the truth of the capture of poor Captain Alvarez, and the death of his cousin, for I am sure that they killed him, for had they not he would have been taken prisoner also, unless he had escaped, and if so, he would have returned to tell you all that had happened."

"Senorita, I beseech you to send that traitor from your home," and Half-Breed Harry pointed to Mayhew.

The face of the latter flushed and then paled, while he replied:

"Senorita, if you believe one word this revengeful wretch has charged against me, let me go."

"If not, let me tell you in all frankness, that you must beware of that man."

"I believe you, Mayhew, and as you both cannot remain upon this ranch, you, Half-Breed Harry, must be the one to go, for never will I forgive your words this day."

"Go, and at once!" and Bessie Bond's eyes flashed fire as she now turned upon the Half-Breed.

"I will go, but he shall not triumph over me, girl," was the retort of Half-Breed Harry, and, whipping out his knife he sprung upon the man he had accused of treachery.

CHAPTER XXI.

A BEAUTIFUL GIRL AT BAY.

As I have said, Mayhew was unarmed, but he seemed not to be taken by surprise at the sudden attack of the maddened Mexican cowboy, and turned to meet him as best he could.

But Half-Breed Harry was a powerful man, also, and armed with his long bowie-knife, sharpened to the edge of a razor, he would have been a terrible antagonist for a man to resist, no matter what his prowess.

The right arm was uplifted, knife grasped in hand, and the left was thrust forward to grasp the throat of his rival. He had sprung with the quickness of a panther upon Mayhew, but, ere they met—the armed Mexican and the unarmed cowboy—there came the sharp crack of Bessie Bond's revolver, and the blade was shattered at the hilt!

The shock caused the arm of the half-breed to drop, as though it had been shot, and loud and clear rung the words:

"Hold, Half-Breed Harry, or I will send a bullet through your heart, if you dare draw your revolver!"

The left hand of the Mexican had dropped upon his revolver, but at the words of the young girl he did not draw the weapon, for her deadly aim in shivering the knife-blade, told him that she could send a bullet through his heart if she wished, and from what he knew of her he was certain that she would do so if he gave her cause.

Quickly he raised his hands above his head, and facing Bessie said rapidly:

"I obey, senorita, for I care not to die by your hand."

"I was mad for the moment, and I humbly crave your pardon, and your mother's."

"It is granted, but you must go."

"Go, senorita?"

"Yes."

"And where am I to go?"

The words were pathetic and seemed to touch Mayhew, for he said quickly:

"Permit me to plead for him to remain, senorita?"

"And, Bessie, I also beg for poor Harry," Mrs. Bond said.

"No, he must go."

"Do you hear, Half-Breed Harry, you are to leave this ranch and before the sun shall set."

The face darkened again and the same wicked light came back into the eyes.

"Do you mean that I who have served you so well, am now to be driven away from you, senorita, to be cast off because I lost my temper?"

"I mean just what I say, Half-Breed Harry."

"You have served us well and faithfully, and have been well paid for your services."

"You have of late sought to be master, to dictate, and I have before felt that we must part."

"To-day you made false accusations against this man, and your real nature exerted itself, and I will not allow a repetition of the occurrence through your remaining."

"So you are to go your way, and may you be prosperous, and contented if you can."

"I was looking over your account but yesterday and I have in keeping for you just two hundred dollars, which I will now pay you, and you have, I believe, three horses of your own."

"What provisions you need you can have; but you must leave this ranch within the hour."

The maiden was as firm as a rock and Mayhew gazed at her with admiration at the stand she took, but ventured so say:

"Pardon me, Miss Bessie, but as this man seems to have been so long in your employ, and knows your ways and all about your affairs, let me, who appear to be the bone of contention, go my way and perhaps all will go well again."

"Mayhew, I have made up my mind, for this is not Half-Breed Harry's only offense, as I happen to know, for when we went to New Mexico, he sought to entrap Buffalo Bill and kill him here in our house, but failed as Surgeon Powell and Texas Jack were within call of the scout's voice, and they came to the rescue."

"The three cowboys whom this man made his allies in the affair were the victims, while he escaped, for I know all."

"Now he has dared to show his feeling toward me, and more, he has sought to take your life, while unarmed, in the presence of my mother and myself."

"He has made a cruel charge against you, to have me get rid of you, and now pleads for mercy which I will not show."

"No, Half-Breed Harry, you must go."

The man's head was bowed so that Bessie and her mother could not see the working of his face.

But Mayhew saw it and knew just what it meant in all its wickedness.

Then he raised his face to Bessie in silent appeal, when, catching the look of indomitable resolution in her eyes, he suddenly wheeled on his heel and started to walk away.

"Hold, sir!"

The man turned.

"I wish to pay you your money."

He said not a word, and going into the house the maiden soon returned with a bag of gold which she handed to him.

He took it in silence, without a word of thanks, and again wheeled and walked away.

"Mayhew, you are to be the chief of scouts upon the ranch, and to manage affairs."

"Go and see, please, that Half-Breed Harry leaves the ranch before dark, and leaves nothing belonging to him behind him, as an excuse to return."

"Let him also have what provisions he may wish."

"I thank you, Miss Bessie, for the honor done me, the confidence shown in me, and I trust to prove myself not unworthy," said Mayhew, and he turned away with a bow to the mother and daughter.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE APPEAL.

THE morning after the dismissal of Half-Breed Harry from Ranch Isle, Bessie Bond dashed up to the stockade gate at Fort Beauvoir, and was promptly admitted by the sentinel.

She rode at once to the home of Madge Burton, who greeted her warmly, for she had become deeply attached to this mysterious young girl.

"Madge, I would like to see Buffalo Bill, so may I send for him to come here?"

"Certainly, Bessie, I will send for him at once," was the response.

The messenger was dispatched to the scout's camp, and soon after Buffalo Bill put in an appearance at the house of the chaplain.

Madge started to leave the room, but Bessie said quickly:

"Do not leave, Madge, for though I wish to tell Mr. Cody a secret I wish you to hear it."

Thus urged, Madge remained, and when the chief of scouts had taken a seat, Bessie said:

"Do you think there is much danger just now, Buffalo Bill, of an Indian outbreak?"

"I hardly know what to say, Miss Bessie, for Indians are like women, you know, one never knows just what they are going to do."

"You slander us, Buffalo Bill, but I'll pardon you, and I know Madge will; but I asked you for a purpose?"

"I hope there will be no outbreak, Miss Bessie, for it means so many lives lost, property destroyed, and sorrow."

"Well, my motive for asking you was to know if you could get off on a special mission for me?"

"If I can serve you, Miss Bessie, I will gladly do so."

"But this is for a special service which may take you a couple of months, and you must not go alone, but have a dozen of your scouts with you."

Buffalo Bill looked surprised, and Madge did also; but Bessie went on to say:

"You remember the two gentlemen who were at Ranch Isle not long ago?"

"Captain Alvarez and Mr. Noel Norcross?"

"Yes, they were so called."

"But now to my secret."

"Yes."

"The man you heard called Captain Alvarez was an officer in the Mexican army, while the other, known as Noel Norcross, was also an officer in Mexico, and his name was Leon Alvarez, the two being cousins and having the same name."

And then Bessie told the story of how Captain Alvarez had been accused of being a conspirator, and had escaped execution, taking the name of her brother, while Lieutenant Alvarez had escaped from prison.

The whole story was told, and then all about the trip to New Mexico to her brother's cabin and grave, and parting there with the two officers, as well as their desertion by their escort.

The letter received by Half-Breed Harry was then spoken of, and what had followed, Bessie ending her story by saying:

"Now, Captain Alvarez, I am sure, with his cousin, were treacherously captured by those four men, for that is the story told by Maybaw, who would not before let me know the fate of the two Mexican officers."

"Lieutenant Alvarez must have been killed, or he, too, would have been given up to the Mexican Government; but certain it is that the captain is a prisoner, and will be put to death unless he can be saved."

"Now, I have certain proofs of his innocence, and I therefore call upon you to help me save him."

"Command me, Miss Bessie."

"In the first place, I wish you to ask Surgeon Powell to shadow Half-Breed Harry, for I believe he really knows where the Deserter Captain is."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and the Surgeon Scout must try and capture the Deserter Captain, for upon that will hang the safety of Captain Alvarez."

"Why can I not do the shadowing, Miss Bessie?"

"Because the Surgeon Scout is an army officer, and remains at the fort, and he cannot be under our orders, though I feel that he will play the Shadow Scout for us."

"But you, with a party of your men, can get leave of absence for awhile to go with me to Mexico."

"With you to Mexico?" asked Buffalo Bill, in amazement.

"Yes, for I am going there to see the governor-general that has Captain Alvarez in his power, and I wish you to be my adviser, friend and protector, and accompany me there on my errand."

"Miss Bessie."

"I mean it, and you will not refuse me, I know."

"I shall give my proofs of Captain Alvarez's innocence to the governor-general of the State, and then I shall pledge myself to deliver up to him the man who made the false accusations against him, and show his purpose, and that he was in league with several Mexican officers who were guilty of conspiracy."

"That man is the Deserter Captain, and he is the one that your scouts must shadow to the end, while we play detectives in Mexico, for Captain Alvarez must not die for a crime he never committed."

"It certainly would be very wrong, Miss Bessie, to permit it if we can save him, and I know that Surgeon Powell will gladly undertake the work of shadowing him to the end, while, with the consent of Colonel Loyal, I will gladly go with you, and with Texas Jack, Buckskin Sam and six others of my scouts who speak Spanish, we can form a safe guard for you on the trail and into Mexico, I feel certain."

"Gain the permission, Miss Bessie, from Colonel Loyal, while I go and have a talk with Surgeon Powell."

"Buffalo Bill, you are a noble man, and I will never forget you for this."

"Come, Madge, you must go with me to plead to the colonel to allow Buffalo Bill and his Scout Shadowers to go with me."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SURGEON SCOUT.

COLONEL LOYAL heard the story of Bessie Bond, and then set to work to urge her against the trip she intended to make.

But Bessie was determined in her purpose, and at last Colonel Loyal said:

"Well, Miss Bessie, as you are determined to go I can only say that I am glad that you go under the protection of Buffalo Bill for he will take care of you."

"Then you will allow him to go, Colonel Loyal?" eagerly said Bessie Bond.

"Oh, yes, for I could not refuse you, and Buffalo Bill is certainly as good a detective as he is a scout."

"I will be glad to give you a letter too to General Garza, whom I met when stationed on the Rio Grande, and I believe you will find him

a very good man though he has the reputation of being a very severe and cruel one."

"Now when will you depart Miss Bessie?"

"I will start at once for home, sir, and the scout and his men can follow later and camp to-night at Ranch Isle."

"I will see that they go well prepared, Miss Bessie; but now about this man whom you ordered off your ranch?"

"Well, colonel, he was brought to our Texas home by my brother, and it was said that he was well-connected in Mexico, but for some reason which he never made known had become a fugitive."

"I have watched him closely of late and am confident that he is known to the Deserter Captain if not his ally, and he, in my opinion, will go to where he can find the outlaw leader, and that is just what I wish, for with that man a prisoner the life of Captain Alvarez can be saved."

After some further conversation upon the subject Bessie Bond returned with Madge to her home and when her horse was led around for her to return home Surgeon Frank Powell rode up to the chaplain's quarters.

"I have come to serve as your escort home, Miss Bessie, though I know you always prefer to go alone," said the handsome and dashing Surgeon Scout.

"To-day, Doctor Powell, I am more than anxious to have your company, for I wish to have a long talk with you," was Bessie's response, and with a kiss of hand to Madge she leaped unaided into her saddle and rode away with the surgeon on the trail to Ranch Isle.

"I have seen the colonel, Miss Bessie," said Surgeon Powell, thus opening the conversation, which, he knew Bessie wished to begin.

"I am so glad that you have, Doctor Powell."

"And I have seen Buffalo Bill."

"To-day?"

"Half an hour ago."

"Then you know all?"

"I know that you are going to Mexico under the escort of Buffalo Bill and four of his men."

"Yes."

"That you start to-morrow, and that your going is to accomplish certain good, the rescue of that handsome, splendid young Mexican whom we all believed was a Texan."

"I admit that I deceived you all, but I could not let all be known."

"You were right, and more so when you sent that evil-eyed Half-Breed away from your ranch as Colonel Loyal and Cody both told me that you had."

"Yes, I doubted him some time ago, and yesterday he tried to take the control of everything in his hands, while he would have committed a murder before my mother and myself, had it not been that I was a little too quick for him."

"He would have murdered you, Miss Bessie?"

"Oh, no, his fury was against Manning Maybaw."

"A strange career Maybaw has had, Miss Bessie, for I believe you know of it?"

"I have heard that he was a cadet at West Point and stood at the head of his class, when he was dismissed for a crime he was afterward found to have been guiltless of."

"Yes, and although he was imbittered with life, under an assumed name he entered the army as a private, worked his way up and meeting the fellow cadet, then an officer, who had been the cause of his ruin, he was recognized, taunted with his crime, and, driven to frenzy, attacked him."

"Believing he had killed him he deserted and became a wanderer, then an outlaw."

"Now he has rendered valuable service to the Government, so a commission is to be granted him on condition that he resign it at once, it being but a salve for his honor, a recompense for his unjust sufferings."

"You have done well to secure the services of such a man, Miss Bessie."

"Yes, and I have made him manager of the ranch."

"And wisely sent off the half-breed?"

"I have, and that is just what I wish you to help me in, for you and Buffalo Bill are known, from your border detective work, as the Shadow Scouts, and you can, by shadowing Half-Breed Harry, discover the hiding-place of the Deserter Captain."

"I undertake the duty with pleasure, Miss Bessie."

"When did the man leave?"

"Last evening."

"Then I will take his trail after seeing you home, and follow as far as I can to-day, returning to-morrow from the fort to pick it up and camp on it until I reach the other end."

"Shall we go through Skeleton Gap, or around?"

"Through Skeleton Gap, for the place has a strange fascination for me."

"And for me," and they rode into Skeleton Gap, neither knowing that they were being watched by a pair of baleful black eyes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HALF-BREED'S DEPARTURE.

WHEN Half-Breed Harry turned away from the piazza, after his dismissal by Bessie Bond,

his heart throbbed violently, the temple veins stood out like whipcords and his hands were clinched until his nails cut into the palms.

He was dizzy and staggered, so overwhelming was the emotion he felt.

Straight to his quarters he went and began to gather up his belongings. He got out a pack-saddle, some serapes, oil blankets and cooking utensils.

He seemed to feel no hesitation about getting food, so drew upon the ranch stores for a goodly supply of flour, coffee, bacon and vegetables.

The stores were all packed, with the camp utensils, on one saddle, and his blankets and clothing upon another.

Then he went to the corral and caught his three horses.

One of these he saddled and bridled, and the other two were made pack-animals.

Mounting then, without a word or look at Manning Maybaw, he rode down toward the stockade.

The cowboys were there and had a suspicion of what was going on, so stood quietly regarding him.

They had not liked the half-breed from the first, but had shown perfect discipline under his command.

"What! going away, Pard Harry?" asked Angel Jim, innocently.

"Yes, that beautiful devil has set me adrift, for she is gone on the outlaw sergeant now."

"See here, Half-Breed; do you mean Miss Bessie Bond, when you speak of a beautiful devil?" asked Jerry Joslyn, the leader of the cowboys.

"That is just whom I do mean?"

Instantly the half-dozen cowboys about the stockade gate covered the Mexican with their revolvers, while Jerry Joslyn sung out:

"Retract that insult thrown at the Border Belle, or we'll fill you full of lead, you Mexican half-breed!"

Up went the hands of the Mexican, for he saw that he was caught, and he said quickly:

"You have got me foul, pards, so I retract what I said about Miss Bessie."

"It is well you do. Now git, for though I don't know the cause of quarrel between you and Miss Bessie, I can guess you that are to blame."

"Git, and don't show your Dago countenance around this ranch again."

The half-breed smiled but made no reply.

The smile was so full of devilry that the cowboys never forgot it.

As the stockade gate was raised and he rode out, he raised his sombrero with mock politeness and said:

"Good-by, cowboy pards. Some day you may meet Half-Breed Harry again."

"I hope not, unless it is to see you hanged," Jerry Joslyn called out, and then he turned to his friends and continued:

"I tell you, pards, it was none of our business, as long as Miss Bessie saw fit to keep that man as chief cowboy, but I felt sure that he was up to some devilry against her, and I knew that he hated Maybaw."

"Well, Maybaw gets his place, that is dead sure, and a more clever man I do not care to serve under."

"Me too," called out Banjo Joe, and the same opinion went the rounds, just as Manning Maybaw was seen approaching with the quick, military step natural to him.

"My friend, Miss Bond, has asked me to come and tell you that Half-Breed Harry has left the ranch, and that I am to be chief of cowboys and manager in his stead, though I assure you I did not seek the honor."

"We are glad to know it, sir, for we respect you, and we gave the half-breed a send-off he will remember," and Jerry Joslyn told of what had occurred.

Then Joslyn called out:

"Three cheers for our new captain, pards!"

They were given with a will, and raising his sombrero the new cowboy chief thanked his comrades and gave a few instructions as to what he wished done, while he said:

"It will be well to keep a sharp watch, pards, for Miss Bessie appears to feel that Half-Breed Harry is the secret ally of the Deserter Captain, who you know is still at large to work mischief."

"If the two of them should plot devilry together, they might any night sweep down upon the ranch with half a thousand warriors, and it will be well to at once change all signals and plans known to the half-breed, and transfer the alarm wires in the approach, to other places."

"Now, do you know if there is any place in the banks where an entrance could be made?"

"I do," said Idaho Ike.

"Well?"

"I noticed that Half-Breed Harry left the ranch several times, and so I watched him."

"He went to the little willow brook to the south of the ranch, and the water has washed the bank so that he rode down into the river and swam across, landing some distance below."

"When he came back he rode in several hundred yards above the willow bank, and landed his horse there in fine style."

"This could be done by good swimmers, but

one man could camp there and guard the place against a score, with his Winchester rifle."

"Well, like, you take two men with you and make a camp there for the night, as there is, of course, no need of watching by day."

You might raise the entrance through the bank, so that a man could not get through easily after landing, and have wood piled up for fires, to light quickly.

"You, Jerry, will take charge of the gate guard, and I believe we can ward off any attack that Half-Breed Harry may make upon the ranch," and Manning Mayhew set to work at once to acquaint himself with the new duties devolving upon him.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SURGEON SCOUT THWARTS THE MEXICAN.

THE one who saw the Surgeon Scout and Bessie Bond ride together into the Skeleton Gap, was none other than Half-Breed Harry!

He had left the ranch, after his trouble with the cowboys, with his mind in a whirl of revenge.

Though he had rather liked the new men under him, the way they had resented his words against Bessie Bond had brought out the venom in his nature against them.

He rode on with a malignant smile upon his face, for he was plotting revenge.

He went along the trail leading toward Fort Beauvoir, but turned off the main road into the canyon which cut through the ridge, and was known as Skeleton Gap.

Though the place was shunned as a pestilence, even by day, by soldiers and scouts, hunters and travelers, he seemed to hold no fear of it.

He rode into the Gap, passed the rocky monument in the shape of a cross upon the ground, which marked the resting-place of the murdered people of a wagon-train, and when through it turned into the hills, halting at a spring.

There he made a temporary camp, as though undecided what his course would be.

Leaving his horse and traps at the camp, he went to a spot that commanded a view of any one passing through the canyon.

Until it was dark he waited there, and no one came in sight, for he seemed to be watching for some one.

Then he returned to camp, but by sunrise was upon his post of lookout again.

He had been there an hour when suddenly he discovered that he had left his belt of cartridges for his Winchester in his camp.

Back he ran in great haste, seized the belt of cartridges and returned to his post.

As he did so, he beheld a horse and rider leaving the canyon.

It was Bessie Bond, and she had passed his position while he was absent for the few minutes that it took him to run to his camp and back.

"Curses! what luck I have, for the girl has gone by."

"If I only had not gone!"

"But I will catch her upon her return and then see if she will be so proud and defiant toward me."

"Oh! how I have loved that girl, and my wolfish nature has been made as gentle as a dove's under her influence."

"I almost began to feel that she loved me, until that devilish Alvarez, masquerading under the name of her brother, came to Ranch Isle, and then I knew well that I was not thought of."

"When she came back from New Mexico without him, I held hope again, until I saw that the man Mayhew held favor in her eyes."

"And now I am sent away, and he is retained."

"Oh, but will I not have sweet revenge for this on you, my beauty, for I shall carry you away captive, and Harry the Half-breed as you call me, is merciless when he hates, and hates one he has loved."

"So the man mused on aloud, and then, with the patience of an Indian lay down to await the return of the maiden whom he now sought to be avenged upon for her having foiled him in his attempt to kill Manning Mayhew."

The man had made up his mind to seek revenge at once, and did not believe that he would be considered as intending it, so thought himself safe from pursuit.

When on his position he heard hoof-falls returning he got ready to act.

"I will shoot her horse, and when she falls, before she can rise will be by her side," he muttered, and he prepared to carry out his wicked intention.

But suddenly his face blanched and a Spanish oath came from between his shut teeth, for he beheld a horseman with Bessie Bond.

"The Surgeon Scout!" he hissed forth.

"I dare not kill him, and somehow I feel that I could not do so, that he bears a charmed life."

"I must still bide my time," and the man drew back into the shadow and watched the two pass within thirty feet of where he lay hidden.

"After all my waiting this is the result."

"Curses upon that man, for he has thwarted me."

"She may not come this way again for days and if I should await and be discovered in hiding here then it will be thought I was waiting for some one to kill them and that would go hard with me."

"I will not stay here now, but go on to where I will be safe, where I can tell the captain of what has happened and that I am determined upon revenge."

So saying the Mexican, as the Surgeon Scout and Bessie had ridden on down the canyon out of sight, arose from his place of hiding and made his way back to his camp.

He saddled his horses quickly and mounting went by a flank movement around to the trail leading to Fort Beauvoir.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TRACKING THE HALF-BREED.

THE Surgeon Scout rode on with Bessie Bond until they came within sight of the stockade at Ranch Isle, and then he suddenly drew rein.

"You say the man left last night, Miss Bessie?"

"Yes, Surgeon Powell."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then this is not his trail, for these are the tracks of three horses."

"Just the number that he had."

"Ah! I supposed he had only one horse."

"No, he owned three horses and took them all, two being used as pack-animals."

"Then this is his trail, for the tracks of one are visible leading, and two following side by side."

"He went this way then?"

"Yes."

"That is toward the fort?"

"Perhaps to the settlement."

"And you will shadow him?"

"I certainly will, especially after what you have told me, Miss Bessie, about his being, as you believe, recently in league with the Deserter Captain, for I would give a year's pay to run down that man."

"And I would give every dollar I own to have you do so, Surgeon Powell, for you do not know what his death means to me," was the impressive response of Bessie Bond.

The Surgeon Scout made no response to this, asked no questions as to her meaning, but only replied:

"Well, Miss Bond, I will try and shadow the Deserter Captain to his just doom without its costing you a dollar of your fortune."

"But I will leave you here."

"You will surely go on to the ranch and see mother and have supper?"

"No, for I wish to get along as well as I can upon the trail before night comes on."

"You expect to meet Buffalo Bill before he leaves of course, for he will camp at the ranch to-night."

"Yes, I arranged to head him off upon the trail of the half-breed, if it ran as I expected it would, and if not to go to Ranch Isle to-night to see him."

"As I note that this trail runs toward the fort, I doubtless will head him off between now and sunset, so will say good-by, Miss Bessie, with the wish that you may have success upon your journey and return in safety."

Bessie Bond held out her hand and warmly grasped that of the Surgeon Scout.

"And I wish you every success, Sir Scout Shadower, and I wish to ask of you the favor that you do not let the Deserter Captain be hanged, if caught, until I have seen him."

"I will see to it, Miss Bessie, that he is not, and that he is not killed, for it would be a pity to cheat the gallows of its just deserts."

"After a few words more the two parted, Bessie Bond going on at a gallop to Ranch Isle, while the Surgeon Scout dismounted and closely examined the trail left by the horses of the half-breed."

He took a note-book and rule from his pocket, and with a pencil sketched the tracks of the three horses, making them, by measurement, the exact size in his drawing.

He noted any peculiarity in the tracks of the three horses, and though it caused him to walk over a mile, until he could get perfect views of each hoof-print, he did not seem to tire at the work, or dislike it.

Mounting his faithful horse once more, for the animal had followed him like a dog, he continued on the trail of the Mexican to where it suddenly branched off and turned into Skeleton Gap.

He still pursued it, turning to the right as he left the cabin, and going on to the camp.

He dismounted there and placed his hand in the ashes.

"Still warm," he muttered.

Then he examined the spots where the three horses had been staked out, and compared the tracks with his drawings.

"No doubt here," he said, and then he found the tracks of the man.

"His high-heel boots left good marks," he said as he followed the tracks over toward the

spot on the canyon side where the Mexican had been lying in wait.

"Ah! he was in ambush here, that is certain."

"And for what purpose?"

Continuing his investigations, the Scout Shadower said:

"He was lying in wait here to catch Miss Bessie, I'll wager high on it."

"Yes, and he e he lay when I rode by with her, and my being along was just about what prevented his stopping her."

"Whether he intended to kidnap her, or merely to have a talk with her, I do not know, cannot even guess; but certain it is that he was here in ambush and intended to halt her at any rate."

"Now to see just where he has gone."

With this the Surgeon Shadower went back to where he had left his horse and mounting continued to follow on the trail of the Mexican.

"He came into this camp yesterday and left it but an hour or two ago, for the incoming trail is a night old, and the outgoing one very fresh."

"Now, to see just where Half-Breed Harry is heading."

He soon found that the trail wound around into the one leading to Fort Beauvoir, and after going for some miles upon it he discovered that it branched off toward the settlement.

"Yes, I did not much think a man of his caliber was going to the fort."

"No, he has gone to the settlement, and that is all I care to know just now, so I can go on and meet Buffalo Bill and pick Half-Breed Harry's trail up again early to-morrow," and the scout started for the fort, to suddenly discover Buffalo Bill and four of his Scout Shadowers coming toward him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TWO BORDER KINGS.

BUFFALO BILL halted as he saw the Surgeon Scout approaching, and he and his four Scout Shadowers saluted the officer, who said pleasantly:

"I wish a little talk with you, Bill."

"All right, sir," and the two rode apart from the others.

They were splendid looking men, both of them, as they sat there upon their horses, the very picture of perfect manhood.

It was no wonder that they were known as the Border Kings, for they had won the name time and again by their daring deeds and their skill as bordermen.

Both were giants in strength, as agile as panthers, and superb horsemen, while with rifle, revolver and lariat they had few equals.

They were devoted friends, and if Buffalo Bill never forgot that Surgeon Powell was his superior officer, when others were near, when alone it was always "Frank" and "Bill" between them.

Time and again each had saved the other's life, and they both knew but too well how one could rely upon the other to the bitter end.

"Well, Bill, I have just left the fair Belle of Ranch Isle, or rather I left her within sight of her home."

"I am glad you went so far with her, Doc, for it was my fear that that half-breed might be lying in wait for her somewhere."

"It was just what I believe he was doing, for I tracked him to a camp in the hills near Skeleton Gap, and then along as far as where I turned off to come to the fort."

"The fellow had not left the camp very long before, and doubtless saw me with her, and so left."

"And where gone?"

"To the settlement, I guess."

"Then we agree all right, for I think that is the place to look for him, and I'd shadow him close, Doc, for there is a barrel of mischief in that dog."

"No doubt of it, Bill."

"If you need any of my boys as shadowers, Frank, you know where to find them."

"Thanks, I may need to call upon them; but now to your mission?"

"We camp to-night at Ranch Isle, and start to-morrow."

"You will have to go awful slow in Mexico, Bill."

"Oh, yes, bet I speak the lingo a little, and Texas Jack and Buckskin Sam speak it well, while Miss Bessie is a fine Spanish scholar I believe."

"Well, I hope you will have no trouble there; but if you do I'll follow on your trail, Bill, for you are too good a fellow to be killed by Dagos."

"But I will not detain you, and I hope you'll get that young Mexican out of his trouble, and when you return I trust I will have the Deserter Captain waiting in the guard-house to be hanged."

"I hope so, Doc; but good-by."

"Good-by, old pard," and the two friends clasped hands in farewell as they had many a time before when going to face death.

"Good-by, boys, and luck to you," called out Surgeon Powell to the other Scout Shadowers, and they answered in a hearty:

"Good-by, sir."

Then Surgeon Powell rode on once more toward the fort, while Buffalo Bill continued on at a gallop with his men to the ranch.

They passed through Skeleton Gap and reached Ranch Isle just before sunset.

Manning Mayhew met them at the stockade gate and the chief of scouts was escorted to the cabin, while the men were made comfortable in the cowboy camp.

"I am glad you have come, Buffalo Bill, for you must have supper with us, and then we can talk over our plans together," said Bessie.

"Yes, Mr. Cody, I wish to know what you think of this daring effort of Bessie's to go to the rescue of Captain Alvarez," remarked Mrs. Bond.

"You are not going then, madam?"

"No, I remain here, for Bessie will have it so, and you are to be her protector."

"I shall certainly do all in my power to protect her, Mrs. Bond."

"I know that, Mr. Cody, but do you not think she takes great risks in going to Mexico as she does?"

"I believe Miss Bessie speaks the language well and has been in Mexico before?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then I do not think she need have any dread of evil, though of course we cannot tell what Miss Bessie may be able to do in the way of a rescue of Captain Alvarez," was the scout's answer.

Buffalo Bill enjoyed greatly his supper at the ranch table, and soon after left the mother and daughter together to talk over matters, while he sought Manning Mayhew to have a chat with him.

"What do you think of this going to Mexico, Mr. Cody, of Miss Bessie?" asked the cowboy chief, and Buffalo Bill saw that he appeared to be very anxious in regard to the maiden's undertaking.

"For my part I would rather that she would not go; but then she seems bent upon doing so, and I will, of course, do my part by her."

"I know, I feel that; but the Mexicans are a dangerous people to interfere with, and with Captain Alvarez again in their power I fear they will never give him up even for Miss Bessie's pleading, and giving proofs of his innocence."

"Well, she must hope for the best to come of the trip, Mr. Mayhew, and let me suggest that you keep a bright lookout for any move on the part of the Deserter Captain and that Dago cowboy the half-breed, for I am sure they mean mischief."

"Should you make any discovery of importance, report it to Surgeon Powell at the fort, for you will find him an able ally."

"I have no doubt of that."

The next morning the Belle of the Border started on the trail for Mexico escorted by Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XXVIII. MET ON THE TRAIL.

BUFFALO BILL was well seconded by Manning Mayhew in doing everything that could be done to make Bessie Bond comfortable on the long journey.

They had gotten a couple of fine horses to be used as pack-animals alone to carry her outfit, which consisted of a small "A" tent, one oil blanket for carpeting, provisions and bedding with all else that she cared to carry along for her own needs.

Her mother had also been anxious to supply her thoroughly, so that when they started there were two well-laden pack-horses for her alone, and one to carry the scouts lay-out, which was complete but simple.

Buffalo Bill had also carried along from Ranch Isle two extra horses, so in spite of an animal being lamed, injured or shot, they would not be delayed.

One scout was detailed to look after the pack-horses and led animals, another was to follow half a mile behind the party, for fear of a surprise, two were to ride with Bessie, and one was to keep all of a mile ahead on the march.

This one was generally Buffalo Bill himself, or if not, Texas Jack or Buckskin Sam, for the three knew the country well and the chief of scouts had not the slightest intention of running into an ambush with his precious charge along.

Bessie cried out against such great caution, but Buffalo Bill told her that they were more than likely to run upon a roving band of Indians, or perhaps a party of outlaws, and he was going to be prepared for any emergency.

The first night's camp was made forty miles from Ranch Isle, and Bessie saw how particular her escort was of her.

Her tent was pitched in a secluded spot apart from the camp, and where any one approaching it would have to first pass the scout sentinel.

Brush was cut with a hatchet and piled up against it to hide the white walls, and the whole outfit was packed up after supper, ready for a quick move if necessary.

The sentinels were each to stand two hours, Buffalo Bill taking his place with the others, for he never shirked duty, and thus they could all get a good night's rest.

At dawn they were aroused, breakfast gotten and the march was begun.

A long halt was made in the middle of the day for a couple of hours, and they went into camp at sunset, having put fifty miles behind them on the second day's travel.

"This will be our limit, Miss Bessie, while the country may cause us in some places to drop below thirty miles."

"At this average we can make a rapid and steady ride of it," Buffalo Bill said.

On the third day as many as fifty miles were made, and the scout ahead had just selected the camping-place when he suddenly saw a horseman approaching him with a very cautious air.

Instantly Buffalo Bill leveled his field-glass at him and muttered:

"It is one of the Mexicans who visited Ranch Isle—the one known as Lieutenant Alvarez."

"Now we will hear the news, and Miss Bessie may not have to go to Mexico after all."

With this he signaled the horseman to come on, just as Bessie Bond and the others rode up to him.

"Who is it, Buffalo Bill?" asked Bessie.

"If I am not mistaken, it is Lieutenant Alvarez."

"Ah! it is he," and the face of Bessie Bond changed color.

A few moments after the horseman rode up to the spot where the cowboys were making their camp.

He looked like a man who had seen hard service; his beard was of several weeks' growth, his clothes worn and his horse very weary looking and gaunt.

"Lieutenant Alvarez!" cried Bessie.

"The Senorita Bessie," was the reply, and the Mexican held forth his hand.

"You know Mr. Cody, chief of scouts, I believe?" said Bessie, as the Mexican paid no attention to the scout.

"Oh, yes; I met Buffalo Bill, the scout, at the fort," was the answer, with no sign of recognition.

"And may I ask where you are from?"

"Mexico."

"And your comrade, Captain Alvarez, for Mr. Cody now knows who he was?"

"Captain Alvarez is dead!" was the response, and it was said in a tone and with an abruptness to hit Bessie Bond as hard as possible.

"Dead?"

"He is."

"I cannot—will not believe it."

The Mexican bit his lips and said:

"I am sorry to pain you, Senorita Bessie, but it is true; Alvarez is dead, alas."

"I wish to know all about his death, and at once," Bessie said in a tone that was an order almost.

"I will tell you the story, senorita, when we are alone."

"I will retire with pleasure," was Buffalo Bill's response.

"On the contrary, Mr. Cody is my guardian, my friend, and I wish him to hear just what you have to say, senor," coldly said Bessie Bond.

Then she added:

"Dismount and camp with us, for here we are to remain for the night."

"Thank you; but I was on my way to your home."

"May I ask why you are so far away from it?"

"I am on my way to Mexico."

"To Mexico?"

"Yes, senor."

"And why?"

"To rescue Captain Alvarez, for I learned through a letter that he had been taken prisoner by a party of Americans and carried to Mexico and delivered over to the Government."

"What became of you, senor, was not stated."

The eyes of the Mexican flashed in triumph at these words, and he said in a low, sad tone:

"I will tell you the whole story, senorita."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MEXICAN'S STORY.

WHILE Buckskin Sam, who was an excellent cook, was preparing supper, Texas Jack was looking to the pitching of Bessie's tent, and the other scouts were caring for the horses and unpacking the traps, the maiden sat down to hear the story of Lieutenant Alvarez.

"I wish you to hear the story, too, Buffalo Bill," she had said, and though Alvarez had said that he wished to tell her alone, and the scout had appeared to wish to withdraw, Bessie was firm, and with a very bad grace the Mexican had yielded.

Buffalo Bill was surprised to see the cool manner in which Bessie Bond took the report of the death of Captain Alvarez, for that she was in love with the Conspirator Captain he did not for a moment doubt.

"You say that Captain Alvarez was captured by four Americans, senor?"

"Yes, senorita, the men who went with us from the cabin of your dead brother."

"They were traitors, then?"

"Oh, yes, perfect traitors, for they had in some way learned who we were, and determined to carry us to Mexico, to secure the reward they knew they would get."

"Yes."

"In our first camp, on the way to the mines, they surprised us by suddenly showing the cloven foot, catching us at a disadvantage, and when we were bound they told us just what their intention was regarding us."

"We begged, threatened and offered bribes, but all to no use, for they were determined."

"They started for Mexico with us at once, and had just gotten us across the border when we were attacked by Indians."

"My horse was killed and the others did not halt for me, so went on, and the red-skins captured me."

"The chief happened to be one whom I had once served well, when he was a prisoner to the Mexican soldiers, and he recognized me, and thus my life was saved."

"More, he allowed me to go free, and I followed on after my unfortunate cousin and his captors."

"In disguise I went into Mexico, and all I could learn was that my cousin had been given up by his American captors and instantly put to death."

"I dared not betray my presence in Mexico, or I would have shared the same fate, and so I decided to return to Ranch Isle and tell you the whole sad truth."

"Our captors had robbed us of nearly everything; but I happened to have a few gold eagles they did not find, and so I stopped here and there at ranches and got food."

"At last I reached the mines, and there I lay ill for some days, and then once more resumed my journey, determined to let you know all."

The man paused, as though overcome with suppressed emotion, and he glanced furtively at Bessie.

She had listened with a face that expressed nothing of what she might feel.

"And is that all, Lieutenant Alvarez?" she asked when he paused.

"All?"

"Is it not enough?"

"It is too much, if true."

"What do you mean, senorita?"

"You did not see Captain Alvarez executed."

"I did, senorita."

"You saw him executed?"

"Yes, he was shot in the Plaza of C—at night."

"I was there in disguise, as I told you."

The head of Bessie Bond was bowed for an instant, but raising it quickly she asked:

"May there not have been some mistake?"

"Do I not know my cousin?"

"Oh, yes, but it was at night, you were in danger of your life and so would not venture too near, and—and—in fact, I cannot, will not believe that Leon Alvarez is dead."

The face of the Mexican grew dark with passion while he hissed forth:

"Do you believe that I would deceive you, senorita?"

"I am sorry to say that I believe that you would."

"This is an insult, Senorita Bond, and I do not understand why you should say so?"

"I will remind you that when we last parted, at the cabin of my dead brother, you told me that you believed that I was engaged to Captain Alvarez, but that I should never wed him."

"That death would come between, and then you would return to claim me."

"As you have returned, or was on your way, and you tell me that Leon Alvarez is dead, I do not believe it."

"I cannot also feel in my heart that Leon Alvarez is dead, and so I am going to Mexico to rescue him."

"You are going to Mexico to rescue him?"

"Yes."

"It must not, shall not be."

"Who will prevent me?"

"I will!"

"May I ask your authority?"

"My cousin is dead, so your going would be useless. Even if he was alive you could not save him."

"You would only be taken prisoner, and what would become of you heaven only knows!"

"For these reasons I say that you shall not go, so return to your home, under my protection, and I will be the brother to you your brother had asked me to be."

"I thank you, Senor Alvarez, but my trail lies to Mexico, and unless Buffalo Bill, who is my protector, forbids, then I shall continue on my way."

"What do you say, Mr. Cody?"

"With you, Miss Bessie, I do not believe that Captain Alvarez is dead," was the scout's quiet response.

"What! do you dare fling the lie in my face?" cried the Mexican to Buffalo Bill, who, without moving a muscle at the revolver covering him, said calmly:

"Senor, to touch that trigger means your death as well as mine."

CHAPTER XXX.

AN APPARITION.

THE Mexican turned quickly, at the words of Buffalo Bill, for he expected to see himself

covered by a scout in his rear, for the scout had glanced in that direction.

As he did turn quick as a flash Buffalo Bill struck his revolver from his hand with a sharp blow and instantly leveled his own weapon at the Mexican, while he said:

"You must not come here into this camp as a guest, Mr. Alvarez, and attempt to run things in your own way."

"I am in your power of course, with your cut-throat gang about you, Buffalo Bill, but I am amazed that the Senorita Bond allows me to be treated so by her guardian."

"Pardon me, senor, but you began the quarrel with Mr. Cody by drawing your revolver on him, because he, as I do, doubted the story of Captain Alvarez being dead."

"You may believe it, but I think you are mistaken."

"Now cease your bloodthirsty ways, and be reasonable, and I am sure Mr. Cody will not press the matter against you."

"Willingly; but, Miss Bessie and I hope that the lieutenant will be reasonable," said Cody, frankly.

The Mexican uttered an oath in a suppressed tone, for he felt that he had displayed over-anxiety to prove Captain Alvarez's death.

He could have told his story in a less determined-to-be-believed way, and he should not have lost his temper with Buffalo Bill, he now fully realized.

To try and redeem himself, he said:

"I am sorry I offended, senorita, and I should not have acted as I did toward the scout here; but I have gone through so much, have suffered so deeply, have been made to feel such keen pain that I am all unnerved, and when my hopes were high at seeing you, when you doubted my story, and the scout said he did not believe me, I lost control of myself."

"I simply said I do not believe Captain Alvarez to be dead, senor, and it is the strong hope of Miss Bessie, that he is not, that aids me in this belief."

"I do not say that you did not see all that you say you did; but, perhaps Captain Alvarez may have escaped after all, as I now know that he did before," said Buffalo Bill, willing to let the matter end where it was until he could have a talk with Bessie.

The maiden seemed to understand this, and so made a remark to cast oil upon the troubled waters, while Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, lieutenant, come with me, and I'll help you to make yourself more presentable for supper, which is nearly ready."

The Mexican obeyed without a word, and Buffalo Bill gave him into the care of Texas Jack, while he made his way back to speak with Bessie.

"I am glad you returned, for I want to speak with you," she said quickly.

"I have come to ask you, Miss Bessie, if you have had reason in the past to doubt Lieutenant Alvarez?"

"Not to doubt him, but to fear him, yes, for I must confess to you, though believing me engaged to his cousin, he deliberately told me that I should become his wife, and made all manner of threats if I refused."

"And then?"

"We parted with a threat upon his part, and now he comes back and tells me that Captain Alvarez is dead."

"He is a prisoner, I know, and under a death sentence, but I do not believe he was executed, as his cousin asserts, or will be until the whole truth regarding his escape before can be known."

"That is why I am anxious to see General Garza and save him by confessing the truth."

"Well, I suspected him the moment you said you were going to Mexico."

"I make the human countenance a study, and I saw that he was playing a game of some kind, and that he intended you should yield your plans to his."

"But I will bring him to supper now, and understanding the situation as I now do, I believe we can get at the bottom facts of the case."

The chief of scouts now walked away, and found the Mexican washed up and looking fresher than when he arrived.

"We will go to supper now, senor," he said, and the two joined Bessie at the little table, which rolled up neatly when packed, and made a very convenient piece of camp furniture when needed.

With coffee, venison steak, biscuit, bacon, eggs, and sweet potatoes, to tempt them, all ate heartily, the Mexican appearing half famished, for his larder had run very low, he said.

"I wish you would tell us all about your capture, senor, for I would like to know the full particulars," said Bessie, as Buffalo Bill lighted his pipe and handed some tobacco to the Mexican to make a cigarrito.

The Mexican told his story again, and dilated upon the treachery of the four Americans who had left the mining-camp with them, and pretended to be friendly with them.

Buffalo Bill asked a question now and then, and kept his eyes fixed upon the Mexican's face, puffing a cloud of smoke from his lips whenever Senor Alvarez glanced toward him.

Bessie asked the same question like a cross-

examiner in court, trying to entrap the Mexican in a dozen different ways, and several times he lost his temper.

At last Buffalo Bill left—to place his sentinels, he said—and was gone for half an hour, when he returned and took his seat by the camp-fire again.

Suddenly a form advanced behind the Mexican, and Buffalo Bill remarked quietly:

"Pardon me, Senor Alvarez, but is that a friend of yours?"

The Mexican turned quickly, uttered a wild yell and sprung to his feet.

But his legs refused to support him, and sinking upon the ground he cried:

"My God! it is his ghost!"

"Take it away! Oh, take it away!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

SHADOWED TO HIS DEN.

THE Surgeon Scout, as a shadower of the half-breed, was off bright and early from the fort the following morning.

He went to the place where he had left the trail the evening before.

There the trails divided, one going straight on to the fort, and the other winding around the spur upon which the fort was situated, into the valley where the settlement was.

He picked up the trail without difficulty and followed it readily, for it was but a day old.

Few people dared venture so far from the settlement and the fort, so the tracks were not numerous.

"He has gone to the settlement, beyond all doubt," said the Surgeon Shadower to himself.

But he held on along the trail, and at last followed it directly into the settlement.

He did not appear to be following a trail, for he cared not to attract attention to himself.

At last he reached the very center of the settlement where, of course, the trail was merged with a hundred others.

But Surgeon Powell cared not for the trail, as he had shadowed the man to his destination.

The next thing to be done was to shadow Half-Breed Harry to his den, to find the man himself.

The best way to do that would be to return to the settlement after nightfall and visit the Devil's Acre and other places, and see where he was.

He dared not ask a soul about him, as the one he made inquiry of might be a friend of the half-breed.

Having tracked the man to the settlement he felt sure that he would not leave it for some little time at least.

Returning to the fort the Surgeon Scout sought Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk, a dashing, splendid young officer who was desperately in love with Madge Burton the Child of the Regiment and was not ashamed to admit it.

"Onderdonk, you play cards sometimes in the Devil's Acre I believe?" he said.

"I did doctor, but I have given it up, you know."

"Ah, yes, I heard that you had wholly reformed, at the request of our Daughter of the Regiment; but you will not mind accompanying me to such a place, I hope?"

"No, indeed, Surgeon Powell, I am at your service gladly."

"Thank you, Onderdonk, but now let me ask you to go prepared to play, and play my money, for I have a motive in it which Miss Madge will admit a good one when she hears it, and I'll stand between you and harm."

"I am at your service, doctor, as you know."

"And go well armed, too."

"All right, sir. I'll be ready when you wish me to be."

And that night at nine o'clock Surgeon Powell called for Otey Onderdonk and the two officers rode over to the settlement together.

They hitched their horses near the Devil's Acre and entered.

They sauntered about the room in a "would-like-to-kill-time" manner, and at last met Emerald Ed and had a talk with him.

"Any thing new, Ed?" asked Surgeon Powell.

"No, doctor, and mighty dull I can tell you."

"No strangers in the settlement?"

"And none likely to be here, I believe, sir, for I hear of no wagon-trains coming westward."

"Do you, sir?"

"No, not for some time, I believe."

"Will you play, sir?"

"No, but Onderdonk wants to try a few games with the Faro Fairy, though I tell him it is no use, for she is the Queen of Luck."

"It is lucky she does win, doctor, for business has been awful dull."

"Any other officers coming over?"

"Perhaps."

"Where is Buffalo Bill to-night, for he generally comes with you?"

"Off on a scout, for you know we are all quite anxious about a visit from the red-skins since the escape of that renegade scamp the Deserter Captain."

"Yes, sir, and there is reason to be with such a man at large."

"I suppose you will show him no mercy the next time you meet him?"

"Oh, yes, I would not harm him for the world, for that pleasure belongs to the hangman; but is not that fellow over yonder the cowboy chief at Ranch Isle?"

"Yes, sir, for he has had some trouble with the fair mistress of Ranch Isle, the truth of which I cannot learn, and he came here yesterday."

"He played last night and won largely and said he intended to break the Faro Fairy's bank to-night."

"Did he win from her?"

"Yes, sir, a cool five hundred."

"Then he is fortunate," and Surgeon Powell walked away to join Otey Onderdonk at the faro-bank.

The young lieutenant had been talking to Keno Kate, but not playing, as the half-breed had just then walked up to the table.

Keno Kate greeted Surgeon Powell most cordially, for the Surgeon Scout was ever a welcome visitor at Emerald Ed's Devil's Acre Saloon.

Just then the half-breed, with his sombrero pulled down over his eyes began to play.

"You are going to try your luck again to-night, are you, sir?"

"Yes," shortly said the half-breed, as he placed his money upon a card, while Otey Onderdonk put twenty dollars upon another card.

"You win, sir," Keno Kate remarked, with a smile, as she handed the man over his money.

"Your luck still clings to you it seems, while you have lost, Lieutenant Onderdonk."

"I always lose in a game with a woman, the lieutenant responded."

"Play the same card that the half-breed does," whispered Surgeon Powell, in Onderdonk's ear.

The young lieutenant obeyed, and Keno Kate said:

"And you win this time, sir, also."

There was no reply, but Lieutenant Onderdonk again placed his money upon the same card that the half-breed did and won.

"Put all your winnings on the next card, Onderdonk, and play the card the half-breed does," said the Surgeon Scout, in a whisper.

And the lieutenant obeyed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A FAIR FRAUD.

"It is the third time that you have won, sir, as has also this gentleman," said Keno Kate, addressing Lieutenant Onderdonk.

"Do you still play, sir?"

"Oh, yes."

"Play another card this time, not the same as the half breed," wrote Surgeon Powell on a card which he handed to the lieutenant with the remark:

"You are in luck, Onderdonk, for here is the amount of your winnings."

This time Lieutenant Onderdonk played a different card from the half-breed, and lost.

"Play the same card with the Dago," whispered Powell, and it won.

"A different card this time."

This was done and the lieutenant lost.

"Different card," muttered the Surgeon Scout and it was done and lost.

"Same card."

It won.

"You have not lost yet, sir," said Surgeon Powell to the half-breed, who muttered in reply:

"I am lucky."

At last Lieutenant Onderdonk said, after a look at Surgeon Powell:

"I do not care to play any more."

"You have won, sir."

"Oh, yes, Keno Kate, he has won in each instance, even when he lost, if you can understand that paradox, for he played against a woman who understands her business too well for her safety."

"See here, my friend has won just two thousand dollars to-night, counting the losses as winnings, for you so manipulated those cards, and I demand that you hand him over that sum, or go with me to the fort as a prisoner."

"For God's sake, Surgeon Powell, do not accuse me of cheating here, or I am ruined, as any one who hears it might believe it," said the woman in a pleading tone.

"Hand over the amount of money you paid this man, for he won, and my friend lost."

"Will you do it?"

"Yes, yes, I am willing to lose the sum rather than have you accuse me openly."

"See here, Keno Kate, I brought those two English gentlemen here with me one night and you cheated them, and Lord Lonsfield caught you at it."

"I determined to catch you, so watched your game to-night, and I detected that you have got two packs of cards there, one fitted into a slide in the table."

"Now I'll not betray you if you will promise to play a square game in the future."

"I'll promise faithfully, Surgeon Powell, only do not you or Lieutenant Onderdonk speak of it here, or in the fort, I beg of you."

"Very well, see that you do not cheat again, for I shall be on the watch, and there is no reason you should, as the bank has so many chances in its favor to win."

"Have you your money, Onderdonk?"

"Yes, thank you, doctor."

"You will not accuse me, gentlemen, I know that you will not," pleaded the woman.

"It depends upon your good behavior, Keno Kate," was the reply of the Surgeon Scout, and as they walked away Powell said quickly:

"Return and play again for a short while, for I wish to watch her from a distance."

"I'll try my luck now, Keno Kate, against yours," said the lieutenant, returning.

The woman sighed and went on with the game, the half-breed now having quit playing, though she remarked:

"This gentleman did not lose a game, so how could I have cheated, lieutenant?"

"Don't ask me, Keno Kate, for I did not see it, though Powell did."

"You have won," she said, shoving him over his money.

"And you have lost," she said, after another deal of the pasteboards in the little silver box, in which shone an emerald.

Thus the games ran until there had been a dozen played, and Otey Onderdonk said:

"Well, we are about even, in winning and losing."

"Just about," said Keno Kate, and it could be seen that the woman was strangely nervous.

Walking away from the faro bank Otey Onderdonk joined Surgeon Powell, who stood just where he could see the Faro Fairy, and yet not be observed himself.

As the two walked toward the door to depart, they met Emerald Ed, who asked pleasantly:

"What luck, gentlemen?"

"You are poorer by two thousand dollars, tonight, Ed, which Lieutenant Onderdonk won, and I guess the Dago from Ranch Isle got into your bank for even more."

"We must expect losses as well as gains, gentlemen."

"I congratulate you, Lieutenant Onderdonk," was Emerald Ed's quick reply, and he added:

"Going so soon?—come again, gentlemen."

The two officers bowed, and as they passed toward the door Surgeon Powell gave a man seated there a significant look.

A moment after they left the Devil's Acre the man followed them.

"You wanted me, Surgeon Powell?"

"Yes, Dashing Charlie. Go back and keep your eye upon that half-breed from Ranch Isle, and note all that he does."

"Shadow him as close as his own shadow until he hunts his den to-night, and then come to my quarters, for I will be up waiting for you."

"Yes, sir," and the scout addressed as Dashing Charlie, a tall, splendid-looking specimen of the genus borderman, returned to Devil's Acre.

"Well, Surgeon Powell, you have the best eyes I ever saw in a man's head, to catch that woman cheating," said Lieutenant Onderdonk, as he rode along toward the fort with the Surgeon Shadower.

"She cheated you, as I saw plainly; and more: she did not pay that Dago a dollar of his winnings, as I heard her say:

"Keep account, sir, and I'll pay you all together."

"She had him as a blind, and I distinctly saw telegraphing between the two, and when you returned to play I watched them closely, and I know now that they are leagued together, and that is what I wished to know."

"Well, I am glad if I helped you; but what is to be done with this money?"

"We'll give half of it to the Army Ladies' Charitable Association, and give a blowout at the club with the balance, and in both instances it will be well spent."

"I agree with you; but did you note how that Dago eyed you?"

"No, I could not catch his eye."

"Well, he had a look that was dangerous when he looked at you, so take care."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DASHING CHARLIE'S REPORT.

It was not too late for the officers to make a call upon Mrs. Major Sidway, the President of the Army Ladies' Charitable Association, an organization which did a great deal of good in looking after the wives and children of needy soldiers, and poor settlers.

Mrs. Sidway was quite astounded when into her hands was placed by Surgeon Powell a thousand dollars in aid of the association, and she insisted that she should at once send the major's orderly around to fetch the other ladies of the order to her quarters to learn the good news.

"I beg you don't do it, my dear Mrs. Sidway, for remember some of the members are so painfully pious that they would lose their sleep if told to-night that the money was won from a faro bank, while, broken to them in the full glare of day, they would be able to recover from the shock before night fell."

"No, tell them to-morrow that it was won from Keno Kate, pray."

"Certainly I will if you wish it, Surgeon Powell."

"And may I ask you to state at the same time that I intend to give a dance and supper in Social Hall, and must request you to receive, with Mrs. Burton and our Daughter of the Regiment?"

"You are so kind, Surgeon Powell!"

"Oh, the money came in the same way, so it will be a combination affair of charity and dancing you see."

Mrs. Sidway was charmed at the prospect ahead of her, and consented to act as the mistress of ceremonies at the dance, so that Surgeon Powell and the lieutenant took their leave.

Leaving Onderdonk at the officers' club half an hour after, Surgeon Powell went to his quarters to find Dashing Charlie awaiting him there.

"What, so soon, Charlie?"

"I had not expected you for several hours, yet."

"Yes, sir, for Devil's Acre closed up early to-night, earlier than I ever knew it before."

"Indeed?"

"Well, sir, the Faro Fairy left soon after you did, then Emerald Ed did the same and Too Slick, Ed's Chinese, came in and looked about but did not play."

"Every one seemed discouraged, and when I left there were not over thirty people in the Devil's Acre and they were playing mighty light, sir."

"And you kept your eye on the Dago?"

"The half-breed, sir?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"He did not play any more."

"Did he leave?"

"Just before I did, sir."

"Which way did he go?"

"He left the Acre and then went to the home of Emerald Ed."

"No!"

"Yes, sir."

"You saw him go there?"

"I shadowed him, sir, and he went to Emerald Ed's stockade gate."

"And went in?"

"Yes, sir."

"He gave a signal?"

"I heard none, sir, but he went in and I saw no more of him."

"And the giant Chinese?"

"He went out through the rear of the Devil's Acre, sir, before the Dago left."

"Well, Dashing Charlie, this is news you bring for I did not know that Emerald Ed ever received visitors in his home."

"Nor did I, sir."

"But the half-breed went there."

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see the Faro Fairy pay the half-breed any money?"

"I did not, sir."

"Did you see them talking together?"

"I did, sir; they talked as I thought most earnestly together, and the woman sent the half-breed to tell Emerald Ed to come to her, for I saw him go up to the gambler and talk for a minute in a low tone, and Ed went straight to the Faro Fairy and they had a short talk."

"She left them, Ed went soon after, the Chinese followed and the half-breed went out of the saloon and I saw him go to the gambler's cabin."

"I passed as near as I could and I caught sight, as the cabin door opened, of the woman—"

"Keno Kate?"

"Yes, sir."

"In Emerald Ed's quarters?"

"Yes, sir."

"You saw her, Charlie?"

"She was seated in an easy-chair, as I discovered when the door opened to admit the half-breed."

"And the gambler?"

"Emerald Ed opened the door, sir, for the half-breed."

"You saw into the room then?"

"Yes, sir, from the bright light in the room."

"I wish you could have gotten near enough to have heard what was said."

"I wish so too, sir, but you know Emerald Ed has a dog which never barks, but he was there all the same, as I heard him, and I dare not go over the stockade, sir, for though I could have knifed the dog it would have caused them to discover that they were being watched."

"You are right, Dashing Charlie, and you have discovered enough for one night; but try and find out to-morrow if the half-breed is stopping with Emerald Ed, for if so, then that means a great deal."

"It does, sir."

"What that woman was doing there I cannot imagine, as she was never known to go to his quarters before."

"Well, sir, I will watch her too, for if there is any mischief brewing then Emerald Ed, Keno Kate, the half-breed and the Chinese are in it, and they are certainly a full hand to play against."

"They are indeed, Dashing Charlie, but we must be sure to hold the trumps that will win the game!"

"Yes, Surgeon Powell, it won't do for us to

be downed by that quartette, for I promised Buffalo Bill to help you in all you needed my aid, and we must get the drop on Emerald Ed and his pards, though playing against a woman is as mighty hard game to beat, and Keno Kate is as dangerous as she is beautiful."

"You are right, Charlie, and as wicked as she is beautiful," was Surgeon Powell's response.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EMERALD ED'S GUEST.

HALF-BREED HARRY had arrived in the settlement by night, and had made his way to what was courteously called the "Hotel."

He had left his horse there and then had sought Emerald Ed.

In spite of his life of seclusion at Ranch Isle the cowboy seemed to know Emerald Ed exceedingly well, for the latter greeted him as he entered the Devil's Acre, and the two went aside for a talk together.

"You say that she dismissed you, Harry?" asked the gambler.

"That is what she did, and more, she put that fellow who had been the outlaw sergeant in my stead."

"You see no one knows who he is, except the girl, and now he has full control there, and I can see he has fallen desperately in love with her."

"I am sent away, and so I came to you to see what we can do about it."

"Well, Harry, we will talk matters over when there is a better opportunity for doing so than now."

"I am not sorry that the affair occurred, for it will give me your services, and I need them in several ways just now."

"Of course, we must not be seen too much together, so I will arrange so you can visit me in my cabin, and we can carry out a plan I have for making a big sum of money."

"The Ranch Isle affair can wait, for this money-making scheme is far more important just now, and we can attend to the fair Bessie afterward."

"Things are shaping themselves now on this border in a way I do not like, so it is well to have all the money we can get, ready for any emergency."

The half-breed was then told how he could reach the gambler's cabin, if need be, and the two parted after certain arrangements had been entered into between them which will develop later.

The half-breed then sought out the Faro Fairy and began to play, and his luck encouraged others to do the same.

But the others were not so fortunate, for Keno Kate raked in their money while paying out the losses of the bank to the Mexican.

It was the next night that Surgeon Powell and Lieutenant Onderdonk visited Devil's Acre and the young officer won.

When the two soldiers left the gambling den Dashing Charlie at once began his shadowing, as has been seen; but we will see what it was that caused the Faro Fairy to leave her bank and Emerald Ed to so quickly follow her.

The woman left by her accustomed way to her own cabin, but turned from the stockade lane into a concealed gate, which carried her into the rear of Emerald Ed's cabin.

She walked up and down the room with nervous tread until the door opened and Emerald Ed entered.

"Well, we lost two thousand to-night to that Surgeon Powell, for I am sure he was backing Onderdonk," she said almost savagely.

"There is no doubt of it, and he was here for some purpose, as he never comes otherwise."

"Still I could not find out what it was."

"I did."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Well, what was it?"

"To get that money!"

"Why did you lose so large a sum?"

"I'll tell you it was no fault of mine."

"You are the best card-sharp on this border and you have said time and again that you could never detect me cheating."

"Nor could I."

"That expertness is your talent."

"Well, he caught me, and so made me pay to Onderdonk every loss which had been on a card, when Henrico had won."

"Be careful—his name is Half-Breed Harry."

"I am careful."

"Then forget his name of Henrico."

"Well, I had to pay it, of course."

"And even Harry used as a foil did not cause others to play?"

"No, for they are afraid of my luck, they say."

"And Powell caught you?"

"He certainly did, and gave me a piece of advice, while I counted out the money to Onderdonk."

"I tell you, Ed, I am getting tired of this sham, evil life."

"I did all for you, and where you are considered a square man, though a gambler, I am forced to do the cheating of the firm and to sin for gold."

"Now I am tired of it, and I see just how it is all going to end."

"How?"

"Why I will be sent to prison and you will be lynched some fine night."

"Bah!"

"Oh, you may say no as much as you please, but we are getting corraled very rapidly."

"Now here comes Harry the half-breed here, having allowed his jealousy of a man to get the better of his temper so that he has made a fool of himself, for that girl has sent him adrift."

"Last night his playing as a foil did get some money for us by the faro-bank, and to-night I lost hundreds over our winnings."

"Powell, Harry says, escorted that girl from the fort to her ranch, and now he is here to-night, so I say unearth our money as quickly as we can, sell out the Devil's Acre for the best sum you can get in cash and let us go away from here, you, Harry and myself, or there will be trouble."

"Well, Kate, I will consider it as soon as I have carried out a certain plan I have to make a big haul."

"What is it?"

"There comes Harry now, so I will tell you when he comes in," and opening the door the half-breed was admitted, as Dashing Charlie, it will be recalled, had observed, catching a glimpse through the opening door of the Faro Fairy seated in the cabin.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE GAMBLER'S GAME FOR GOLD.

HALF-BREED HARRY entered the cabin and threw himself into an easy-chair like one who felt perfectly at home in Emerald Ed's quarters.

"Well, Kate, you slipped up to-night on that young officer?" he said.

"Yes, the Surgeon Scout caught me cheating, and I tell you I am beginning to fear that man more and more."

"As I am."

"He can be handled if taken in the right way," said Emerald Ed.

"If harm came to Surgeon Prank Powell or Buffalo Bill, mark my words, Ed, it would cause more trouble upon this border than if the garrison should be massacred."

"We fear those men and yet we dare not get rid of them."

"You are right, Kate, unless it could be done as though they were killed by Indians."

"I tell you that Buffalo Bill has turned his scouts into shadows, and Powell has become a Doctor Detective."

"We are getting cornered, and my advice is to strike quickly and well in our own behalf and get out."

So said Half-Breed Harry.

Then Emerald Ed remarked:

"Now hear what I have to say, and I believe you will agree with me that the plan is a good one and will bring money."

"Well?"

"Out with it, Ed."

"You know it would be a great scheme to capture the girl Madge, but she does not move out of the house now, under orders from her two English kinsmen."

"Yes."

"Well, she is out of the question, as to being kidnapped, so the next best thing is to get the real heir."

"She is the real heir," said Keno Kate.

"You are mistaken."

"What are you going to spring upon us now, Emerald Ed?" asked Half-Breed Harry.

"Just this, that the Daughter of the Regiment is not the real heir, as believed."

"Who is?"

"Her father."

"Granger Goldburst?"

"Yes."

"He is dead."

"He is not."

"Why, he was massacred by the Indians?"

"He was not."

"Well, what do you know about it?"

"I know that he was badly wounded by a blow on the head by a tomahawk and left for dead."

"An Indian chief whom he had once found wounded and taken to his home and cared for, saw him and took him to one of the Sioux villages."

"Goldburst's reason was partially destroyed for a long while by the blow, and so he seemed to have forgotten the past."

"He was taken to the head village of the Sioux after the death of his wife and brother-in-law and the escape of his daughter, and at once became a power among the Indians, being looked upon as an especial favorite of the Great Spirit."

"He had far more power than the native medicine chiefs, and in time held an authority which the others dared not dispute."

"At last his reason returned to him, and finding himself living among the very tribe that had destroyed the lives of those he loved and wrecked his home, he at once decided to remove from them and reside to himself."

"He called a council of the chiefs and told them that the Great Spirit had appeared to him in a dream and told him to go to the mountains and live the life of a hermit, that he might the better watch over his people, his red brothers."

"Not an Indian, even to the white renegades among the tribe, said a dissenting word and so it was that the man went to live a lone life in the mountains, and within sight of the home where he had dwelt, in Massacre Valley."

"That man is Granger Goldburst, and I know where his home is."

"Well, Ed, how can you make any money out of this, for I cannot see," said Keno Kate, who had listened to the story of Emerald Ed, as had Half-Breed Harry, with the deepest interest.

"I'll tell you."

"I am sure he has no money."

"Very true, and would not pay a dollar to secure his title and estates."

"But the man does not know that his daughter, his only child, escaped death, and with her alive he would be glad indeed to live and claim his own for her sake."

"He is dwelling there in the mountains, and is content to die there now."

"But my game to get his gold is to have Half-Breed Harry go to him, for I will tell him how to find him, and tell him that his daughter is not dead, and he will, for a certain sum, take him to her."

"Remember, the man twice went into the valley, where the soldiers had besieged the party escorting the Englishmen in search of him, and sent them away."

"He told Buffalo Bill that Granger Goldburst was dead, that he had seen him die, and he gave to him certain belongings of the pretended dead man, his note-book and other things, and these seemed certain proof."

"The man lives, however, and he can be found readily."

"When he knows that his daughter lives, has grown to be a beautiful girl, he will be glad enough to give up his hermit life and come and claim her, glad enough to pay a big sum for the restoration of his child."

"Do you see?"

Both the woman and the man plainly saw the situation in their favor and said so.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HALF-BREED HARRY RECEIVES ORDERS.

It was very evident that Emerald Ed held the key to a very important money-making scheme.

Keno Kate saw it at a glance, as did also Half-Breed Harry.

"It is a splendid chance to get gold," said the woman.

"It is indeed," was the Mexican's response.

"You have planned well, Ed."

"So you have."

"Now the thing is to grasp the situation."

"And make the most money out of it."

"Yes."

"And he ought to pay all of twenty thousand dollars."

"Every dollar of it."

"He must pay more."

"More?"

"Yes, thirty thousand; for what is that sum to him if he can get his child back?"

"Well, Ed, I am ready to go and find him."

"All right; I will give you full particulars now."

"Well, excuse me, for I am out of sorts and tired, so will go to my den," said Keno Kate.

"That Surgeon Scout, Doctor Detective, or whatever you wish to call him, has completely unnerved me to-night."

"I will see you before you go, Harry."

"Well, it depends, Kate, upon when Ed wishes me to start."

"At dawn in the morning, for delays are dangerous."

"All right, I am ready."

"I'll say good-by now, Kate," and the half-breed stepped forward and kissed the woman affectionately.

"Take care of yourself, Henrico," she said, earnestly.

"I always do that, Kate," was the answer.

The woman then swept from the room, went out into the stockade lane, through the secret gate, and thence to her own cabin, which no one suspected had a means of communication with Emerald Ed's home.

"Now we are alone, Ed, I have something to say to you," said Half-Breed Harry.

"Well?"

"It is about this mistress of Ranch Isle."

"Mrs. Bond?"

"No."

"Who then?"

"You know that Bessie is the boss."

"Well, what about her?"

"Just this: that I love the girl with all my heart and soul."

"You?" and the gambler started.

"Yes, and I hate her, too, with the same devotion, if you can understand that."

"Oh, yes."

"Now, I have heard it whispered by the cow-boys that you have been seen to secretly meet her at Skeleton Gap."

"Yes, I have met her there several times, but in a business way."

"Now, of course, I understand that you can be no rival of mine in that quarter."

"Of course not."

"I intend to get the girl into my power some day and you must help me."

"Yes."

"If she will not marry me, then I will force her to pay me a very large sum for her ransom."

"I see."

"You will help me?"

"To kidnap her?"

"Yes."

"Of course, when this other matter is settled."

"I mean that, for I will go on this gold trail first, and then we can manage the other matter, and both will bring big money, I am sure of it."

"Oh yes."

"But now to explain about this hermit."

"I am all attention."

"He is a man of large stature, with long hair and beard which have grown white under his afflictions though he is not yet fifty years of age, I should judge, and physically a giant."

"He is known as the Hermit of the Mountains, so the whites call him, and the Indians call him the White Spirit of the Mountains."

"He has a hut built over the entrance to a cavern in the top of a mountain spur."

"The cavern has half a dozen tunnel-ways, for the man appears at different points unexpectedly, and the Indians believe that he comes through the mountains."

"You can find him in one way, or he will find you, rather."

"Go to the valley under the spur and raise a white flag on a pole in full view of the cliff."

"Wait near it and the Hermit will come to you, for he never allows any one to go to his cabin, though once I did go there in his absence."

"If he does not come the first day he may be away from home, so show your flag day after day until two Sundays have passed."

"Then if he does not appear, take the trail to his cabin as you will find it marked upon this map."

"You will also find the spot marked where you are to set your flag."

"I understand."

"You had best take a pack-animal well supplied, for you may be absent some weeks."

"I will."

"Now when you meet him tell him that you have come to sell him a secret."

"Tell him that the two English officers are still at Fort Beauvoir, but that you know that his daughter lives, that you have every proof of it, and that if he will write you an I. O. U. to be paid when he meets his child and knows that there is no doubt, you will take him to her."

"I understand."

"Tell him that he is heir to a noble title and vast estate, and his daughter will get all if he will come and claim her as his heiress."

"I will."

"Then ask him what he will give for the secret, and if not up to the demand, tell him you wish thirty thousand dollars."

"All right, and I will bring him here to you?"

"Yes."

"I'll do it, and will be off in the morning," and Half-Breed Harry soon after departed, while Emerald Ed muttered:

"So he loves Bessie Bond, does he?"

"He is getting dangerous, and after he serves me I must put him out of the way."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

RED ROBIN.

THE scene changes again to the southward trail, the camp of Bessie Bond, and her escort of Scout Shadows under Buffalo Bill.

When the Mexican officer, seated at the camp-fire, had suddenly turned to behold near him a human form, he had cried out in terror that it was a ghost.

Had he possessed the power in his limbs to fly away, he would have taken to his heels with all speed.

But he was powerless to move, and so sunk down and gazed in horror at what to him was an apparition of the dead.

"Miss Bessie, this man was on a trail, saw our fire, and came to our camp."

"When he learned whose camp it was, he asked Texas Jack to allow him to speak to you, saying that it was important."

"Jack brought him to me, and after a few words with him, I sent him here, and it seems that his coming has frightened the lieutenant badly out of his wits."

So said Buffalo Bill, and the Mexican heard all that he said.

With an effort he now gathered control of himself, and rising to his feet, cried:

"I saw that man killed, as I believed, and beholding him, I supposed it was his ghost."

"Senorita, that is the leader of the band of four who made Captain Alvarez and myself prisoners to take us to Mexico."

"I will kill him now as he deserves."

But the revolver he sought to draw was not used, as Buffalo Bill boldly sprung between him and his intended victim who seemed as though dazed with surprise.

"I will manage affairs here, sir, not you."

"Put up that weapon or I will kill you," roared Buffalo Bill, and the Mexican obeyed with alacrity.

"Texas Jack!"

"Ay, ay, Bill."

"Disarm that man wholly."

"What! am I to be insulted thus?"

"Senorita, will you permit this outrage upon—"

"The Senorita Bond does not command here, sir, and unless you submit you will lose your life."

"You are not to be trusted with weapons I see, so I intend to be upon the safe side."

Bessie Bond looked on in utter amazement.

What did all this mean, she wondered.

She did not utter a word, while Texas Jack stepped forward and quickly disarmed the Mexican.

"Now, Miss Bessie, we will hear this man's story, for he gave me a hint that we had been imposed upon."

"If I wrong the lieutenant I shall feel sorry, and offer an apology."

"If he refuses to accept, of course I am answerable to him."

"But you, Miss Bessie, shall decide between these two men, for if this stranger tells the truth, Lieutenant Alvarez deserves hanging."

Bessie Bond found herself face to face with an important situation.

But she was equal to the occasion and said:

"I have doubted Lieutenant Alvarez, and this man may prove whether I was right or wrong."

"Do you know this man, Miss Bessie?"

"Yes, he is known as Red Robin; from his evil deeds I believe the name was won, and he was one of the escorts of my mother and myself to New Mexico."

"Yes, and the man who led the attack upon my poor cousin and myself and carried him to Mexico to be executed," said Alvarez.

"I tell you, senorita, that man is a snake to be dreaded."

Red Robin made no reply at this charge of the Mexican against him, but turned to Bessie, as though waiting for her to speak.

"Well, Red Robin, what have you to say?" said Bessie.

"Has Senor Alvarez told his story, miss?"

"He has."

"May I ask what he has said?"

"Do not tell him, senorita, for he seeks only to contradict me when knowing what I have said."

"If he has done what you have stated he should know, senor, just what you have told me."

"Sit there, lieutenant, and you, my man, sit there; but first give me up your revolvers," said Buffalo Bill.

Without a word Red Robin unbuckled his belt and handed over his arms.

"You have no others?"

"None, sir."

"Now tell your story to Miss Bond, and Buckskin Sam you be ready to nip any demonstration of the senor in the bud, should he feel inclined to make trouble."

"I'll do it," and Buckskin Sam, a small, wiry, black-eyed, fearless-faced man of the Shadow Scouts Band took his position near the Mexican.

Bessie sat back in the shadow, where her face could not be seen, and the firelight streamed full upon the countenances of the two men who were to be pitted against each other as to facts or falsehoods.

"I wish, Red Robin, to hear your story from the time you and your comrades left my mother and myself in the canyon where my brother was buried."

"Yes, miss."

"I have heard the story of Senor Alvarez, whom we met by accident as we have you, and if true, then his story is a sad one for me and there is no use of my going to Mexico, for I am now on the trail there."

"If not true, then I shall continue on my way."

"Now, Red Robin, tell all that you have to tell, and I will judge between you two."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

RED ROBIN SPEAKS.

"I WAS going to see you, miss, straight to your home, and so I'll tell ther truth, for I has no reason ter lie, unless it be for shame at what I were guilty of."

So said Red Robin as an introductory speech to what he intended to reveal.

"You must not lie to me, my man, for I want the whole truth," sternly replied Bessie Bond.

"Waal, miss, I'm going to trade a leetle with

yer, and Buffalo Bill here, for if I convicts myself I am liable to git inter trouble."

"That is true," muttered the scout.

"But, if I has your word, miss, and Buffalo Bill says it's a go, I'll talk like gospel fer truth, and hide nothing."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I wants your promise, miss, and Buffalo Bill's, that when I've done the square thing in my talk I kin go my way."

"You have to answer for this, Buffalo Bill, for I cannot," said Bessie.

The scout was not going to allow the punishment of one man, who, perhaps, deserved even hanging, to stand between the chance of learning something of importance, so he answered:

"I'll give you my pledge, Red Robin, for I believe the colonel will sanction it, that you shall not be molested from any confession you may make concerning yourself."

"And I also pledge myself, Red Robin, to use any influence I have with Colonel Loyal to protect you," Bessie said.

"I can ask no more, miss, and as Buffalo Bill said, you are to be the judge to try the case, and I believe you will be just."

"What is all this nonsensical talk about?" angrily said the Mexican.

"You will soon learn, senor," replied Bessie.

Then turning to the outlaw, she continued:

"Now, Red Robin, I will hear what you have to say."

"There is not a word of truth in his story," growled the Mexican.

"Miss Bessie is to be the judge, pard, of which of us has lied."

"You know, miss, that when that gent and his cousin, who is a gent, came to your house, you asked the man you knowed as Don Eduardo Vincente, but who was found out to be the Deserter Cap'n, for an escort for you to New Mexico."

"Well, he sent ther sergeant, and a squar' good man he were, and I only wish we had not turned ag'in' him, ter guide yer ter ther mining-camps."

"Ther Deserter Cap'n had laid a plan with ther sergeant ter give up ther two Mexicans to ther Government, and ter make you a prisoner, too, you and your mother, ter be held for his coming as conspirators."

"But ther sergeant went back on ther captain, and he tried to perfect ther two Mexicans, only we had found out ther' was money in 'em, and so we decided ter act."

"Ther sergeant fought for you, miss, and so we only tuk ther Mexicans, and pretending we was deserting the outfit to go to the mines, and would guide 'em as far as we went."

"Waal, that Dago, got inter a quarrel with his cousin, and about you, miss."

"About me?"

"Yes, miss, he made sart'in statements which ther cap'n resented, so there was a duel to be fit."

"That was our chance, so we didn't put no bullets in ther weapons, and the Dago fired in great shape, ther cap'n firing in ther air."

"We had disarmed 'em, so I told 'em it was a bogus duel and we took 'em prisoners."

"Up speaks ther lieutenant here then and says as how ther' is a big price on ther cap'n's head, that we could never git through Mexico with them, and he'd play officer and deliver up his cousin, giving us the reward."

"This man said so?"

"Yes, miss."

"It is a tissue of lies from beginning to end," said the Mexican.

"Continue, Red Robin."

"Yas, miss, I will."

"We seen ther truth of his statements, and so we give him control and sure enough he took us along on our way without a mistake."

"He went to see the governor-general one night, and the next we all went along with the prisoner."

"We gave up the prisoner, the lieutenant here got his pardon, and we got our money, twenty-five thousand pesos in gold."

"Then he said he was to conduct us to the boundary line, and see us safe across, when he was to return and report to the governor."

"Well, miss, it burt us all to give up the cap'n, for he is a splendid fellow; but then we wanted money, so did it."

"The lieutenant here guided us back to the frontier, and our last night in camp treated us to some liquor."

"I has the bottle, and I'll tell you it was poisoned."

"Poisoned!" cried Bessie Bond, in a tone of horror.

"He tried to poison you?" sternly said Buffalo Bill.

"It is an infamous falsehood, and I will not sit here and listen to such charges against me," cried the Mexican, springing to his feet.

"It is just what you will do, sir."

"Sit down and hear all, or I will force you to do so," cried Buffalo Bill, and Buckskin Sam drew the Mexican back to his seat in a way that showed him he would stand no nonsense.

"Now, Red Robin, let us hear the rest of your story," said Bessie, eagerly, for she was deeply interested now.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A FAIR JUDGE.

"He did poison us, Buffalo Bill," said Red Robin, continuing his story, and in answer to the remark of the chief of scouts.

"You see I didn't drink so much as the other three did, and I was the only one who did not die."

"What?" cried Buffalo Bill, sternly, while Bessie's face paled as she said in a voice hoarse with emotion:

"Can this be true?"

"It is true, miss, for he did not drink his, and we did."

"I came to, and found I was half-dead."

"I felt as if I had been used as a mop, and my head was bursting open."

"But I got to the brook, drank some water and bathed my head, so felt better."

"Then I looked up my comrades and they was stone dead."

"This is awful."

"It is, miss."

"The lieutenant had skipped, after robbing us of the Mexican gold and other things and money we had with us."

"He took his own and a pack-horse and left us for wolf-meat."

"I buried my pards, then took their weapons and traps and horses, and started on the trail o' that gent."

"I were used up, so went inter camp, and it come on ter storm and rain, so ther trail were lost."

"But I supposed he had gone back to ther governor, as he had his pardon, and I went back on ther trail I had come."

"I went to a army camp and told ther cap'n, as I was afeerd I'd git inter trouble, and he sent a man on to ther governor with me."

"I found ther governor had not seen ther lieutenant, but I told him how he had sarved us, and he was good enough ter buy ther horses of my pards and their traps, and I come back with ther money, for I felt sure the lieutenant had come ter tell you a different story and impose on you."

"I seen yer camp-fire, so I came ter find out who were camped here, and that is all I has ter say."

"And Captain Alvarez?" quickly asked Bessie.

"Is a prisoner to ther governor, miss."

"And was not executed?"

"No, miss, and was not ter be until certain matters was cleared up, I heerd."

"And you declare that you have told only the truth?"

"Only ther truth, miss; I'll sw'ar to it."

"Yer see, if yer s'arches ther lieutenant, yer'll find all our gold and other things he tuk."

"I trailed him coming back, and found he had played poor in a mining-camp, and the boys had given him a bag of dust. He lost his horses going across a stream, so the boys gave him another along with the dust, and I'll bet big money you finds he's rich."

"He said that he had been robbed and had no money," observed Buffalo Bill.

"Why, miss, he had what he tuk from Captain Alvarez ter begin with, and his own money. Then he got twenty thousand in Mexican gold, and what we had, along with some jewelry and other fixings we had got hold of."

"He wasn't robbed, so I guesses if yer s'arches him, yer'll find what I tell yer."

The Mexican was now as pallid as a corpse, and he sat glaring at his accuser with a look of deadliest hatred. Only the fact that Buffalo Bill was there prevented his springing upon him.

Buffalo Bill looked at Bessie and asked:

"Shall we verify this man's statement by a search of the Mexican, Miss Bessie, and his traps?"

"Yes, we cannot do less, now."

The Mexican sprang to his feet to dart away through the timber, but Buffalo Bill seemed prepared for just such an act, for, quick as a flash, he threw his lasso and in an instant the man was dragged backward and Buckskin Sam had sprung forward and pinioned him to the ground.

A call from Buffalo Bill brought one of the other scouts to the scene, and within a minute of time the Mexican was securely bound, hand and foot.

Then Buffalo Bill began to search him, while he ordered the man's saddle and traps brought to the firelight.

One by one the gold belts of Red Robin and his pards were found, and it was seen that they contained Mexican gold.

Then the belt of Captain Alvarez came next, with the Mexican's own buckskin purse.

A leather pouch was full of jewelry, watches, bracelets and other things which showed that they were the treasure of some outlaw who had done a thriving business as a road-agent.

A canvas bag of gold dust was next found, and, just as Red Robin had said, all the valuables he had spoken of, and the money, were brought to light when the man and his traps were searched thoroughly.

Alvarez was silent, but his bosom heaved and his eyes glowed, while he bit his lips until the blood came, so intensely did he feel his having been thwarted in his plans.

"He has money and valuables, with the gold-dust, Miss Bessie, to amount to all of thirty thousand dollars," said Buffalo Bill.

"And the twenty-five thousand an' the jewelry is mine, for I is the only heir o' my pards," said Red Robin in a low, speculative tone.

"You must await the decision of the judge, my man, for it is for her to decide," was the response of Buffalo Bill.

"And what do you say of all this, Mr. Cody?" asked Bessie.

"Have you formed your opinion Miss Bessie?"

"I have."

"My mind is made up."

"That the Mexican is innocent or guilty?"

"Guilty of every accusation against him," was the decided verdict of the beautiful judge.

CHAPTER XL.

THE DECISION.

"Do you dare to side against me, Senorita Bond, taking the testimony of this avowed outlaw as truth?" cried Lieutenant Alvarez, when he heard the decision of Bessie against him.

"I need only his statement verified by facts, for you told me that you had been robbed, that you had gone in disguise to Mexico, and here I find you pardoned by the governor-general, and more, the belt of money and papers belonging to your cousin Captain Alvarez, and the money of this man and his three companions, with jewelry and other things to condemn you and vouch for his statement.

"Yes, Leon Alvarez, I do decide against you, and I leave you to the mercy of Mr. Cody, for he knows best what should be done with you."

"He will hang me," gasped the Mexican.

"That is just what you deserve," said the chief of the Shadow Scouts.

But then he added:

"I think, Miss Bessie, it would be well to take the Mexican back to Mexico and deliver him up to the governor-general, telling him exactly the charges against him."

"I think it would be a bright idea to do so, Buffalo Bill," Bessie said.

But she and Buffalo Bill both saw the man's face brighten at the decision, while Red Robin said quickly:

"Pardon me, miss, and you too, Buffalo Bill; but that man is a Mexican, has been an officer, and yer'd never get through the country with him a prisoner, for you is Americans."

"He knows this, and that's just what he wants yer to do."

"I believe you are right, my man."

"Yes, he certainly is."

"Now, what is to be done with the prisoner?"

As Bessie asked the question, the change on the face of the man was marked, for his hopes fell when he saw that he was not to be taken to Mexico.

"Say, my man, I cannot well spare any of my scouts to go back, so can I trust you?"

"Yer can, Buffalo Bill."

"Would you undertake to deliver this prisoner to Colonel Loyal for me?"

"I'll do it, Pard Bill."

"Mr. Cody?"

"Yes, Miss Bessie."

"If we deliver him up to Colonel Loyal we make a military prisoner of him, and if we needed him, say for an exchange, it would not be easy to get him."

"Very true, Miss Bessie."

"Now, let this man take him to Ranch Isle, with a letter to Manning Mayhew from me, telling him to keep him securely a prisoner until our return."

"That is it, Miss Bessie."

"We can then promise this man, Red Robin, his pardon ourselves, and I can write Mayhew to give him a place as guard of the prisoner until we get back."

"If he has done his duty honestly, then we will give him the money which belonged to himself and comrades, and to which I feel he is entitled."

"That which was stolen property can be turned over to Colonel Loyal as such, while, of course, what belonged to Captain Alvarez I will take to him."

"Does this decision suit you, Buffalo Bill?"

"Perfectly, Miss Bessie."

"But, Red Robin, will you undertake to carry the prisoner to Ranch Isle?"

"I'll do it, and I'll git him thar."

"I'll act squar' with yer clean through, for I sees yer means ter do right by me."

"Jist write yer letter, miss, and give me a few dollars, and keep ther balance until yer sees I has done my duty."

"I'll start back for Ranch Isle in the morning, and we'll git thar in three days."

"You will have to be very careful, Red Robin, for you have a dangerous prisoner to guard," said Buffalo Bill.

"I knows that he is bad, for he showed me what he would do when he p'zened us all."

"If yer needs any more proof I has the bottle with the name of the drug man on it, and I'll bet if yer stops there and asks the kind of man who did the buying, you'll find the description answers ter that Dago gent."

"I have no doubt of his guilt, Red Robin," Bessie said.

"If yer has, miss, jist wait until yer sees ther governor, and I does hopes yer'll git thar in time ter save poor Cap'n Alvarez, for I likes him, I does."

"Yet sold him," Buffalo Bill said sternly.

"I was sorry then, I is sorrier now I did do it, Pard Bill, and I only hopes you'll git thar ter save him."

After some further conversation Red Robin was told to go to his blankets and get a good night's rest, while the prisoner had manacles put upon his wrists.

Bessie and Buffalo Bill then talked together for a while, and then the letter was written to Manning Mayhew, and a note to Mrs. Bond.

This duty done Bessie retired to her tent, and Buffalo Bill went on duty as a sentinel to stand his time.

The night passed away without any incident, and the camp was awake for an early start the following morning.

Alvarez asked to see Bessie alone for a moment, and Buffalo Bill took him to her.

Whatever he asked the scout could see that his earnest pleading was in vain, for there was no mercy in the beautiful face of the Border Belle, as she said in her determined way:

"No, Senor Alvarez, I am not one to forget, and I do not forgive an injury done with studied malice to wrong me or mine."

"You plead in vain, for you go to Ranch Isle as a prisoner to await my return from Mexico."

"Red Robin, are you ready to start?"

"Yes, miss."

"Then go," and Bessie turned away, and leaped lightly into the saddle as Texas Jack led her horse up to where she stood.

CHAPTER XLI.

HALF-BREED HARRY SHADOWED ON THE TRAIL.

THE day following the interview between Surgeon Powell and Dashing Charlie, the latter entered the quarters of the Doctor Detective and found the latter just finishing his breakfast.

"Well Charlie, any news?"

"Yes, sir, a little."

"Sit down and tell me about it."

The scout took the proffered seat and said:

"The half-breed has gone, sir."

"Ah, left the settlement?"

"Yes, sir."

"When?"

"At daybreak, sir, I guess, for there was no dew on the trail."

"Tell me about it?"

"Well, sir, when I left you last night I went back to the settlement and took a walk by the cabin of Emerald Ed."

"As I did so the door opened and the half-breed came out, the gambler walking to the stockade gate with him."

"I dodged into the shadow and saw the half-breed pass out, but all I could hear was Emerald Ed say:

"Make no mistake now, Harry."

"He called him Harry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then the half-breed answered:

"I've done making mistakes, Emerald Ed: I play none but winning games, now."

"A good resolution certainly."

"Yes, sir, if he holds a hand full of trumps."

"Well said, Dashing Charlie."

"But then—"

"Emerald Ed stood at the gate for some time after Half-Breed Harry walked away, so I could not leave my hiding-place."

"When Emerald Ed returned to his cabin I then went on to the hotel and was told that the Mexican had gone up to bed."

"So I concluded to put up there myself for the night and did so."

"I went to breakfast at seven and then loafed about the stables until I heard that the half-breed had gone away."

"He still kept his room at the hotel, I discovered, but he had gone away with a pack-horse in lead, and that looks as though he intended to be gone some time."

"It certainly does, Charlie."

"But which trail did he take?"

"Toward the mountains, sir."

"Ah! that looks bad."

"It does, sir, for it may mean that he has gone to join the Deserter Captain up in the Sioux village."

"That is just what it may mean, Dashing Charlie, and I shall take his trail very quickly."

"May I go, sir?"

"You mean alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"No, Charlie, but I'll tell you what you may do."

"Yes, sir."

"I will start this morning, as though simply for a ride in the direction of Ranch Isle."

"When well away from the fort I will flank around and cross the trail of the half-breed and press on until night; in fact, try to get as near as I can to him."

"You wait until night, and have all ready to follow me, bringing an extra horse for me, and a pack-animal as well."

"My servant will supply you with provisions, and as soon as it is dark, push rapidly on toward the Phantom Pass, for if the half breed has taken the trail you say he has, then he must go through the pass."

"Sure, sir."

"If he has gone that way, I will await you in the pass, and if not, just wait for me at the pass, so we will be sure to meet."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, you understand my plan?"

"Yes, sir, perfectly."

"I will have my servant give out that I am not well, for I do not wish it known in the settlement that I have left the fort."

"It will be best, sir, not to have it known."

"Yes; it can be reported around to-morrow that I am on the sick list."

"But now I will start, and will carry provisions enough with me for a couple of days, and my india-rubber and a blanket, so as not to appear to be going off on a long trail."

Half an hour after, the Doctor Detective, having reported his intended departure to Colonel Loyal, mounted his best horse and started out of the fort, apparently for a ride of a few miles.

Getting out of sight of the fort, he began to oblique to the right, still pushing further away from the fort, and after a ride of a dozen miles, came upon the Phantom Pass Trail.

He was just ten miles from the settlement.

There on the trail he saw fresh tracks, left by two horses.

He took out his note-book, dismounted and examined the tracks.

"They are the half-breed's horses, that is certain."

"It is just eleven o'clock, and he left at day-break, so he is well on to six hours ahead of me."

"I must push on rapidly, so, Dandy, do your level best," and the splendid blood-bay horse was put off in a canter along the trail.

With an occasional glance at the trail the Doctor Detective followed it readily, and so had no reason to slacken his pace until a couple of hours had passed.

Then he halted for a rest for his horse and lunch for himself.

After half an hour he again mounted and pressed on, though not as rapidly as before.

He traveled steadily for a couple of hours, when the nature of the country was such that he had to go very slow.

But he was glad to see that the trail of the man he shadowed had freshened, showing that he had gained upon him considerably.

About four o'clock he reached Phantom Pass, and the trail of the half-breed went beyond it, but, to the surprise of the Surgeon Scout it did not bear away toward the Sioux village, but to the right, and for what reason Frank Powell was at an utter loss to comprehend.

CHAPTER XLII.

A SIGNAL ANSWERED.

DASHING CHARLIE obeyed orders to the letter, and when the first shadows of night fell he was mounted and ready to start.

He was well mounted, had Surgeon Powell's extra horse in lead and carried another along for himself, using him as a pack-animal.

As he had a direct point in view, he made up his mind to push rapidly on, so that he could get rest for his horses and himself after reaching Phantom Pass, and thus be ready for the work of the following day.

He knew the trails well, and pushed on through the darkness at a speed that was rapidly throwing the miles behind him.

It was therefore a couple of hours after midnight when he rode into Phantom Pass, a canyon where the Indians were wont to say that all warriors went through on their way to the happy hunting-grounds.

He had neared the overhanging cliffs, and was going at a slow pace, when a voice suddenly called out:

"Halt! Hands up!"

"Surgeon Powell?"

"Yes, Dashing Charlie, I was on the watch for you, and have been since midnight."

"I was asleep yonder among the rocks, for I knew your hoof-falls would arouse me."

"You have made good time."

"I pushed on rapidly, sir, as I did not know but that you might need me."

"Well, I am glad you are here; but come to my camp and we will get some rest."

The Doctor Detective's camp was an eighth of a mile away, and well located.

The tired horses were staked out with the surgeon's steed, and then a cold supper was eaten, the two talking meanwhile.

"The half-breed has not gone to the Sioux village, Charlie."

"Indeed, sir?"

"He went to the right after passing through Phantom Pass."

"What does that mean, sir?"

"He has gone on to the head of Massacre Valley, for he went into camp some ten miles from here."

"Then I came back to meet you, as soon as I felt sure that he would remain all night."

"If he does not start until dawn, and we do, we will only be a few miles behind him, so can readily catch up at our will."

"Yes, sir, after having caught up so close when he had such a start."

"Yes, a whole day ahead of you, and some six hours in advance of me; but he did not travel very fast."

Throwing themselves upon their blankets the surgeon and the scout dropped off at once to sleep, and awoke only with the first glimmer of the day.

They soon had their horses ready, and pushed rapidly on until they drew near the camp of the Mexican.

The scout dismounted and scouted ahead, but finding the camp deserted, signaled to Dashing Charlie to come on.

The fire had been left burning by the Mexican so that Surgeon Powell decided to cook their breakfast there and this halt of over an hour gave the horses another rest.

Starting again they pushed on steadily, following the trail readily until noon when they came to a ridge which commanded an extensive view of the distant Massacre Valley with the mountains beyond.

And there in a motte of timber in the valley plain they beheld a human being.

The man had just come out of the timber and was on foot.

In his hand he carried a long pole which he had cut in the timber, and halting upon a little mound he stuck the stick up and attached to it a large white flag.

The wind caused the white flag to wave gracefully and after regarding it for some time the man returned to the motte out of sight of the two watchers.

"What does that mean, sir?" asked Dashing Charlie.

"It is a signal of some kind."

"To whom, sir?"

"That is what we must find out, Charlie."

"I should certainly like to do so, Doctor Powell."

"Well, if he has given a signal he will wait to have it answered, so we can go into camp beyond the ridge and take it easy."

"If he stays there any time we can do our cooking at night beyond the range."

"Yes, sir."

"You were not with us, Charlie, when we were corralled in Trapper's Mound and Buffalo Bill brought help by a signal?"

"No sir, but I heard that some one had told Buffalo Bill that if he ever found himself in need of help when near the Massacre Valley, if he would signal with a flag it would not be long before he would receive aid."

"Yes, and he did signal, with a flag tied in the top of a tree."

"And aid came, sir?"

"Yes, an old man came who is known as the White Spirit of the Mountains, and his word was law to the Indians who besieged us in Trapper's Mound for they departed."

"It was this same old man who told Cody that he had seen the heir the two English officers are searching for, and gave him some things that he left."

"I wonder if that can be a signal from the half-breed, sir, to the old White Spirit of the Mountains?"

"It certainly looks as if it were, Dashing Charlie, but we will wait and find out."

And find out they did, for the following day the signal was still flying, and toward noon they saw a man on foot leave the base of the mountains and walk toward the spot where the signal was.

And as he did so the half-breed came out of the motte, also on foot, and moved forward to meet him.

"The signal is answered," said Surgeon Powell, impressively.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE WHITE SPIRIT OF THE MOUNTAINS.

IN the mountains overlooking Massacre Valley was a bold spur that jutted out from the main range and ended in a cliff which looked sheer downward several hundred feet.

It looked like the huge prow of some mighty vessel.

There was a space of an eighth of an acre upon its summit, and there arose the spur to a height of a hundred feet more, and the rocks were wild and picturesque in the extreme that towered far aloft.

At the base of this second spur stood an humble log cabin.

It was commodious in size, had a shelter which served as a piazza along the front and was very stoutly built.

In front of the cabin lay a couple of wolves and a panther, and an eagle and a raven sat upon a perch near by, with an owl hiding in the dark shadows of the rocks over the cabin.

The door was open and revealed a room of some fifteen feet square, and furnished with a bed, table, shelves and a cupboard.

There were some books on the shelves, a flute

and a number of things made out of wood and clay, evidently the work of a skilled hand with the knife.

Skins of wild beasts adorned the walls, stuffed birds were everywhere with snakes and animals of every description, showing that the occupant of the lonely cabin had the right to be called a skillful taxidermist.

Several rifles were on brackets, and half a dozen revolvers, a bowie-knife and a cavalry saber, while a musket with fixed bayonet was also visible.

In the rear of the cabin was a massive fireplace, and the smoke, instead of going up a chimney, found a vent through the rocks of the cliff.

At one side of the fireplace was a narrow opening over which hung a blanket, now drawn aside.

The sound of steps echoed in this opening, and soon a man appeared, rifle in hand and a string of game in the other.

He stood his rifle by the door, placed his game out under the shed in front and spoke a kind word to the panther and wolves that greeted his coming, along with the eagle and the raven, even the owl giving a hoot of welcome.

The man then threw some wood upon the coals of fire, put on a pot of water to boil and seating himself out in front began to clean a fish lately caught, the string of birds awaiting their turn next.

He was a man of striking appearance, one of majestic mien.

Over six feet in height, his form was erect and muscular, and was clad in buckskin even to the moccasins.

His hat was a slouch encircled with a band of bird feathers of every hue.

The face was a noble one, but darkly bronzed and had a touching look of sadness resting upon it.

His hair and beard were white and very long, and yet there was that about the man that indicated youth, rather than age that would thus whiten his locks.

It was just sunset and as the glimmering, golden light fell upon him seated there he presented a weird, strange picture.

At last he glanced over the valley and arose to his feet.

"A signal," he said, and going into his cabin he returned with a field glass.

"A white flag, yet I see no one."

"It was not there this morning."

"I will see if it is there when the dawn comes and if so answer it by going."

With this he put away his string of game, threw the fish into a fryingpan, put some coffee on and a hoe-cake in the coals, so soon had his supper ready, and ate it with apparent relish.

Smoking his pipe after the meal was ended, he seemed lost in deepest reverie for a long while.

But at last he arose, and opening the door said a kindly word to his wild beast pets, the owl answering with a most dismal hoot.

Then this strange man retired to his humble bed and sunk to sleep.

But with the dawn of day he was up, cooked breakfast, and then looked out from the cliff over the valley.

"Yes, the flag is still there."

"I will go and see what it means."

With this he took up his rifle and left the cabin by the narrow aperture in the rear leading into the rocks.

In some ten minutes he came out of a cave far down the mountain-side, and set off at a brisk step down the valley toward the strange signal which had caught his eye.

The half-breed had made his camp in the timber, and as was his custom, for he loved his ease, he had made himself very comfortable even for the short time which he expected he would have to wait.

He had planted his flag, and had then gone to his camp to wait.

Should the signal be answered while he was away in search of game, or asleep, he had put a card upon the flag-staff with the words:

"Come to the camp in the motte to the south."

The next morning he had breakfast and enjoyed it, for he had caught a fine fish from the brook near by, had a broiled antelope steak, some roasted potatoes, crackers and a cup of coffee.

Then he staked his horses out in a fresh grazing-ground, and walked to the edge of the timber to see if he could discover any signs that his signal was answered.

As he reached the open, he beheld the form of the White Spirit of the Mountains standing by the side of the staff which floated his signal flag.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE LOST HEIR.

THE Mexican was a little cautious in approaching the White Spirit of the Mountains, for he did not know exactly how he would be received.

He saw that the strange man had read his note, and had also discerned him, so he called out:

"This way, friend."

The stranger advanced at once, but was on his guard.

"The white flag denotes peace, but it may be a trap."

"Who can it be that has signaled me thus?" said the Hermit, to himself, as he walked toward the Mexican.

When he got half the distance to the motte he halted and called out:

"Do you wish to see the White Spirit of the Mountains?"

"I do, Senor Hermit."

"Then come to me."

The Mexican obeyed, and as he advanced gazed curiously at the man.

"Well, sir?" said the Hermit as the other advanced with extended hand.

"You are he whom they call the White Spirit of the Mountains?"

"I am."

"Come then to my camp with me, for I have business with you."

"I have business with no man."

"But I can be of service to you."

"No man can serve me, for there is nothing that can be done for me."

"You take the gloomy side of life, my friend."

"I have had reason to."

"Not so much as you may feel."

"You do not know."

"I know more than you can think."

"You are a Mexican?"

"Yes."

"I read now that you are of Spanish and Indian blood."

"You read well."

"What have you to do in this land?"

"I live here."

"Where?"

"Not far from Fort Beauvoir."

"Ah! and why have you come here?"

"To find you."

"Why have you come to seek me?"

"I have business with you, old man."

"Let me know what it is that you would say to me?"

"Then come to my camp."

"No."

"Do you fear to do so?"

"Are you alone?"

"I am."

"I notice two horses."

"One is a pack-animal."

"Who sent you here?"

"I came from one who knows you well."

"Who?"

"The Deserter Captain!"

"That human reptile."

"You are severe."

"I know him."

"He speaks of you as his friend."

"I am the friend of no white renegade who leagues himself with red-skins to kill his own race."

"Well, we will not quarrel, but it is in his power to help you."

"How?"

"He told Emerald Ed, the gambler of Devil's Acre, that you were the heir to a fortune in England and a title."

"I do not believe it."

"Emerald Ed sent me to you to give you proof of it."

"Bah! I want no proof, for I am what I am, and shall so remain."

"You will throw away high rank and a fortune?"

"Yes."

"You are a strange man."

"I am one who is content to live and die in these wilds."

"But there is much for you to live for, Granger Goldhurst."

The man started at the name and asked quickly:

"What did you call me?"

"Granger Goldhurst."

"That man is dead."

"Who?"

"Granger Goldhurst."

"You are mistaken."

"I am not."

"You are Granger Goldhurst."

"I?" and the Hermit laughed as though greatly amused.

"Yes, you are Granger Goldhurst, an ex-officer of British Hussars, and now Lord Vancourt, with a large fortune to back up your title."

"This is nonsense."

"It is the truth, and that is why I am here to seek you."

"You must seek in the grave for Granger Goldhurst," was the sad response.

"I say no, and I am here to find you."

"I tell you that Granger Goldhurst is utterly dead to the world."

"So you believed when misfortune and sorrow overtook you."

"But do you know Lord Lucien Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder, for they have been months on the border seeking you?"

The Hermit started visibly and then the reply came:

"Tell them to go back and report Granger Goldhurst dead."

"See here, Hermit, I came here to find you."

"I know that you are the man I seek, that you left India after a fatal duel, wandered to America, married in Louisiana and then came West to the mines."

"You struck it rich, established a home in Massacre Valley and then lost your family at the hands of the red-skins."

"You were wounded and taken to another village, by a chief who was your friend, while your wife died in the village where she was taken prisoner."

"Her brother was killed in trying to escape with your little daughter, and you in despair came to the mountains to hide yourself and your grief from every eye."

"Now, these English gentlemen are seeking you, and they do not know where to find you."

"I do, and have found you, for the Deserter Captain knows that you are not dead."

"I came here for a purpose, for your good and mine, and I am ready to talk business."

"If you expect money for telling me of the fortune and rank awaiting me, let me tell you now, once for all, that I will not pay you one dollar, for I prefer this life, and here will remain."

"Now you have my answer."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE COMPACT.

THE Mexican was a deep enough reader of human nature to know that the Hermit meant just what he said.

There was no need of holding out to him a prize of rank and fortune.

He had done with the world, was dead to it, as he had averred, and would not be dragged back into the whirl of enjoyment while his heart was in the grave with those he loved.

But the cunning Mexican had held his best card as a trump to play at the last.

He seemed impressed by what the Hermit had said, and for a moment was silent.

Then he broke the silence with:

"If you were not alone in the world, it would be different with you."

"Ah, yes, how different."

"But I am alone, all alone."

"Suppose I tell you to the contrary?"

"What?"

"Suppose I tell you that one you loved is not dead."

"You would lie to me, that is all."

"I would not lie to you."

"See here, man, do not play a false game with me in the hope of getting gold, for did I have my hopes raised by your words, and then be dashed down again to the depths of despair, I would tear your heart from your body in revenge."

The Hermit had grasped the Mexican as he spoke, and held him as in a vise's grip.

Strong as he was, and wiry, the half-breed felt that he was as a child in the hands of the Hermit, and he even had to cry out with pain at the grip upon his shoulders.

Instantly he was released.

"Pardon me, but I feared you intended to trifle with me."

"Oh, no; I meant just what I said, for I have good news for you, only I'll be frank enough to say it is for sale."

"Come, let us not stand here and talk, but go to my camp."

"No, I never go to the camp of any man."

"But, you must come to mine, and if you deceive me, you will never leave it alive. Dare you come under such terms?"

"I do."

"Then come."

"I will get my horses, and you can ride one, for the pack he carries is light."

"I never ride a horse, now. Get your horses, and I will await you."

The Mexican hastened away and the Hermit began to pass to and fro, but in deepest meditation.

At last the half-breed returned, mounted upon one of his horses, and leading the other.

"Follow me!" was the command.

The Mexican obeyed, and was forced to admit that a man who walked as did the Hermit appeared to have no need of a horse.

He crossed the valley, turned into the mountains and ascended to a natural meadow, or open, of a few acres.

"Stake your horses here, for there is a stream, you see."

The Mexican obeyed, and hiding his traps among the rocks, followed the Hermit on up the mountain.

Presently the Hermit halted and said:

"You must submit to being blindfolded?"

"I am content."

He was then securely blindfolded, and, taking the slender form of the Mexican in his arms, he threw him across his shoulder as he might a child, and strode on at the same quick step.

A long walk succeeded, but at length the burden was lifted from the shoulder.

"Now I will take off the blindfold," the Hermit said, and the half-breed found himself

under the shed roof of what was the piazza of the Hermit's cabin.

"Sit there," he ordered, pointing to a rude chair.

"Now we will have dinner and then we can talk."

The Mexican bowed assent, and the Hermit kindled a fire and went speedily to work cooking dinner.

The half-breed ate with the air of one who had an appetite, and was in good humor with himself and the world.

The Hermit ate sparingly, then lighted his pipe, and led the way out to the shelter again.

The view was a grand one, and Harry, the half-breed, sat in greatest admiration of it, while he waited for the strange man to speak.

There sat the Hermit, his eyes fixed upon the valley, the winding river, distant hills, and the vast expanse of scenery spread out before him, as though he too were drinking in its beauties for the first time.

He puffed away at the large pipe, dug from the sacred quarries of the Indians, and into which had been skillfully cut a coat-of-arms and a name.

At last the Hermit awoke from his reverie with a start, and he turned his gaze upon his guest, whose presence he seemed to have forgotten for a moment.

"You said, over yonder in the valley, that you had good news for me?"

"I told you so, yes."

"And that the news was for sale?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I will just tell you it is that for which you would give your fortune; but, when I make known just what it is, you can make me an offer of a sum you are willing to pay. If that sum is not the price I have in my mind to demand, then I will name the amount the secret is worth to me."

"Very well; I am content. Now, speak!" and the voice and look of the Hermit were commanding.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE TERMS.

"Now, Senor Goldhurst," began the Mexican half-breed, "I wish to say to you that your wife did die in the Indian camp. She died of a broken heart, for she believed you to have been killed, and was not certain as to the fate of her child and brother."

"She was buried by some of the Indians whom she had befriended in her home in the valley."

"The man who led the attack upon the valley was one who was a white renegade, and chief of the Sioux, one who had been your foe when you were working in the gold mines."

"My God! I half believed this," said the Hermit.

"He also believed that you had been killed until one day he saw you in the other Sioux village when he went there."

"He would have put you to death then, but dared not on account of the hold you had upon the Indians, and soon after you went away to dwell in the mountains alone as a Hermit as you now are."

"Yes."

"Your brother-in-law, a mere youth in years, was plotting the escape of his little niece and himself. He did not know that his sister had not been killed, but sought to get away with the little girl. He told little Madge—"

"Madge?"

"Yes, that was her name."

"Yes, yes; but, but how did you know?"

"I told you that I had a secret to tell you."

"Well, do not delay I implore you," and the Hermit was growing very nervous now.

"The brave little girl was ready for anything, and so her young uncle told her of his plan."

"Brave boy."

"At last the day came when the escape was to be made and the youth started to carry out his plans."

"He was successful in getting away from the village, but met with a wandering band who gave pursuit and his horse was wounded."

"Compelled to leave the animal he ran for some distance alongside of the one ridden by little Madge, and then, as the Indians were gaining, leaped up behind her."

"Even when on the eve of escape he was wounded."

"Mortally?"

"Yes, so it proved, and he discovering it, bound the girl to the saddle, held on as long

as he could do so, then bade her go on, as he could escape better on foot."

"He slipped off and the horse ran on."

"And the brave, noble boy was killed?"

"Oh, yes, of course, butchered by the Sioux."

"Heaven preserve his brave soul."

"He did his duty, senor."

"Ah yes, nobly."

Then after an instant of reverie the Hermit raised his head quickly and asked:

"And my child?"

"My little Madge?"

"With her light weight only the horse easily distanced the pursuers, for the youth had chosen well the animals on which to escape."

"The little girl kept the horse going as long as she could, and when night came on went to sleep in the saddle to which she was bound so securely."

"That night the horse was seen by a white man and the young girl was found."

The Hermit could not speak for joy, only sat gazing into the face of the Mexican with a look that was most pathetic.

"The one who thus found her was poor, but he took her to his home and cared for the little waif for years."

"And she lives now?" came in a gasp from the strong man.

"She does."

"Heaven, I thank Thee!"

The words broke from the lips in fervent thankfulness and then the strong form quivered with emotion.

Springing to his feet the Hermit began to pace to and fro, and it was some time before the Mexican dared break that silence.

At last the Hermit turned upon the Mexican and said sternly:

"You tell me that my daughter lives?"

"I do."

"There is no doubt?"

"None whatever."

"Did you ever see her?"

"I have."

"When?"

"Three days ago, but often before."

"Where is she?"

"That is my secret."

"Ah! that is the secret you have for sale?"

"It is."

"There is no mistake?"

"None."

"Mind, I'll tell you that you are dealing with a dangerous man, and a desperate one."

"If this is a concocted story, with some girl willing to play the part to deceive for gold, you will wish that you had never been born to raise my hopes, and then dash them to the earth by letting me discover that it is a falsehood, a plot."

"There is no deception, for your daughter lives."

"How large is she now?"

"Grown, of course, for though she was a little child then, now she is a maiden of seventeen."

"My God! I have always thought of her as a little child."

"But, come, name your price."

"You are willing to go to her?"

"My God! do you deem me a brute?"

"What I would not do for myself I will for her."

"Describe her?"

"A beautiful girl, graceful, and ladylike, for she has been well reared and educated, and has a lovely nature, while she is brave as a man and accomplished."

"She is one to be proud of."

"Name your price and lead me to her."

"You will be a rich man, remember, so give me your written agreement to pay me fifty thousand dollars when you are convinced that the girl is your daughter."

"I will do it," was the quick response of the White Spirit of the Mountains, and at his words the face of the Mexican beamed with triumphant delight.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A WELL-REMEMBERED FACE.

LET us now go back many pages, kind reader, to the time when Captain Alvarez, the Conspirator, was left in the power of the Governor-General of the Mexican State of C—.

In the quarters of the governor-general were barracks for a small military guard, and a prison.

It was to a cell in this prison in the general's quarters that Leon Alvarez was taken.

The orders given the young officer who was in charge were peculiar, for the governor had said:

"The coming of this prisoner is not to be made known, nor is his name to be taken, or any offense set down against him.

"You are to place him in the solitary cell, and furnish it comfortably for him, while the sentinel of that corridor is to be notified that he is to report it unoccupied.

"Do you understand, Senor Lieutenant?"

"Perfectly, Senor General," was the answer.

"You are not to put him in irons, for there is no chance of escape, and you are to see that he is fed from the officers' mess."

"Yes, Senor Governor."

"Again, you are to carry to his cell from my quarters any books he may need, and only the servant who waits upon him is to be permitted to see him, the guard allowing no one else to enter that corridor."

"Your orders shall be obeyed, Senor General," and the young officer led his prisoner away, for he was awaiting outside under guard.

He dismissed the guard and conducted the prisoner himself to his cell, giving his orders to the sentinel at the end of the corridor to report the "Solitary" as it was called, unoccupied.

"You will find this a pleasant cell, senor, and I will make you comfortable with a carpet, bedding and some books, while you are to be supplied with your meals from the officers' mess."

"You are very kind, senor, to me indeed."

"I have my orders, senor, from the governor-general.

"I will make you as contented as you can be behind iron bars."

The lieutenant left and Leon Alvarez saw that his cell was a large one, clean, and had two windows.

There was a cot-bed, but this was soon stripped by a servant and better bedding put on.

A table and easy-chair were added, a bathtub and then a number of books were placed before the astonished prisoner.

"It is late now, senor, so I will leave you.

"The same servant will bring you your breakfast in the morning.

"Good-night."

"Thanks, Senor Lieutenant, and *Buenas noches*," replied the prisoner, and he was left to himself.

"Well, this is strange," he muttered.

"What does it mean?"

"I cannot comprehend it.

"Ah! I suppose the governor-general is determined to make me as comfortable as possible, so that I can the more regret having to go out of life.

"Well, if die I must, and I see no hope that it be otherwise. I am content, for little have I to live for now.

"Oh, that he who has the same blood in his veins that I have, should be so vile, so treacherous!

"It is terrible to contemplate that Leon Alvarez should have sold me for revenge.

"And now he seeks to go back to Ranch Isle and wed Bessie Bond.

"I can never believe that she will ever be made to suffer by such an alliance.

"Well, it is late, and I am tired, so I will retire."

Thus musing, he sought his couch, and found it most comfortable, for he slept well.

In the morning a tempting breakfast was furnished him, and as he sat by the window, after the meal, puffing a cigar, the door opened, and the governor-general entered, unannounced.

Captain Alvarez arose quickly, and courteously greeted him.

"I do not believe you recognize me, Captain Alvarez," he said, looking him straight in the face.

"I have long known of General Garza by reputation."

"Well, when we last met, I had a full beard, and was in the dress of a *vaquero*.

"I was on a secret mission I could not have known, and was the bearer of a very large sum of Government money, and most important papers.

"To avoid certain outlaws I had reason to know were in my path, I was about to cross

to the American side of the Rio Grande, when suddenly I was surrounded by the very men I sought to avoid.

"My horse was shot under me, I was slightly wounded, and would have been killed, for I was one against seven, when suddenly a horseman came to my rescue.

"He was crossing from the American side, saw my danger, and boldly attacked tremendous odds to save me.

"He did save me, too, by a most gallant fight, and aiding me to mount one of my assailants' horses, rode on his way, saying he would have the bodies buried by his men.

"I could never discover who my brave defender was, and did not dare make myself known, as I was upon a secret mission, so he risked his life to save one he deemed a poor *vaquero*.

"When I saw you last night I beheld a long-remembered face, and I knew that you were the man who saved my life, and that, in citizen's dress, you were returning from across the Rio Grande.

"Senor Captain Alvarez I am glad indeed to meet you again," and the governor-general grasped the hand of his prisoner with a warmth that showed he was in deep earnest in what he said.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE LIEUTENANT'S TREACHERY KNOWN.

THE time had not gone by for the return of the Mexican Lieutenant Alvarez, so the governor-general was in no way anxious about him.

He did not see why, with the pardon in his possession, he should not return as he had pledged himself to do.

For the man he now felt the greatest contempt, and he only wished that he could get some reason for holding and punishing him for his cruel treachery of his noble cousin.

The prisoner meanwhile fared well.

His table was supplied with the very best of food and he had books and all else sent him which would aid in passing the time pleasantly.

The governor visited him now and then at night, and his conversation was always cheerful, though he held out no hope to him that he would not be executed in the end.

One evening the governor's orderly came in and reported to him that one of the Americans, who had come as a guard with the prisoner, was very anxious for an immediate audience with him.

He was admitted at once, and the governor saw the man Red Robin, whom he had observed at his last appearance at his quarters.

Red Robin spoke Spanish badly, but the governor was a fair English scholar, so said:

"Speak in English, senor."

Thus urged the man began his story by asking:

"Has Lieutenant Alvarez returned, Senor Governor?"

"He has not."

"Ah, Senor Governor, but I have a story to tell you of the treachery of that man."

The governor did not appear to be in the least degree surprised at this, so said:

"Well, what has he been guilty of?"

Then Red Robin unbosomed himself, and the way he did talk was a surprise to his hearer.

He told the whole story of the getting of the two officers into their power at the duel between them.

The cunning manner of the lieutenant in saving himself was told, as also his last treacherous, murderous act in deliberately poisoning the four Americans, robbing them and leaving them all as he supposed dead, going, as Red Robin supposed, back to C—.

The governor's face darkened as he heard all, and he said:

"Well, senor, I only hope he will come back here.

"You remain and see if he reports at the time when he is due.

"If he does, you shall appear as his accuser.

"If he does not, then you may know that he will never return, and act accordingly.

"In the mean time I will have you cared

for, and when you leave will buy your extra horses of you and help you."

Red Robin readily consented to remain, and was given pleasant quarters during his stay, but was told to keep out of sight, as if the lieutenant did return and saw him, he would know that he had been reported to the governor and so take flight.

The days passed by and the time for the return of Alvarez came and he did not come back.

Three days did Red Robin wait, and then he told the governor that he must return to the States, that he was sure that the treacherous man had gone to Ranch Isle to try and marry the young lady to whom Captain Alvarez had been engaged.

At this the governor hastened to get him away at once, and besides furnishing him with funds for his expenses, purchased of him the horses of his comrades.

Their weapons and outfit Red Robin also disposed of, and thus supplied he started upon his long trail to Ranch Isle.

That he met upon the trail Bessie Bond under the escort of Buffalo Bill and his shadowers, and found with them none other than the man he sought, has already been seen.

To Captain Alvarez the governor made known the return of Red Robin and just what had occurred to him.

"My cousin has set out upon a course which will bring him to the end of a rope," was the captain's reply.

"Well, I only wish that he would return here, Senor Alvarez, knowing all I do now of him, and of his double treachery to you," the governor responded.

"He has returned to the home of the Senorita Bond beyond all doubt, Senor Governor."

"And will do all he can to harm you with her."

"That, senor, he cannot do.

"I was engaged to her once, but it all ended when I escaped from death at the muzzles of the execution squad.

"I saw her again and she told me that she could only be as a sister to me, that never could we be more."

"She surely could not have been won from you by your cousin?"

"No, senor, for she disliked him I am sure.

"I cannot understand it all, but certain it is that she drove me from her, and now I am calmly awaiting the end, for all hope for the future is gone.

"But you will find that I will die as a soldier should, Senor Governor, for I have nothing to recall, nothing to ask forgiveness for, and I am not one to beg for mercy," was the proud reply of the doomed man.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A FAIR VISITOR.

SEVERAL weeks after the departure of Red Robin for the States, the governor-general's orderly announced a lady and gentleman who asked an audience.

And he added:

"The senorita is very beautiful, Senor Governor, and the senor most distinguished looking.

"They are Americans, I think, Senor Governor."

The governor at once ordered them admitted, and when he beheld them he was convinced that the orderly knew what he was talking about when he described them.

There before him was Bessie Bond, in her riding-habit and sombrero, and looking very beautiful.

By her side stood Buffalo Bill in his dress as chief of scouts, and certainly the governor thought him a most distinguished looking man.

"Senor General Garza, I believe?" said Bessie in the most perfect Spanish.

"Yes, senorita, at your service to command," was the courteous reply.

"Permit me to present to you this letter, Senor Governor, from Colonel Loyal of the United States Army."

"From my old friend the Senor Colonel Loyal, as noble as he is brave.

"I am happy to greet you"—and he glanced at the letter—"Senorita Bond, and you also, Senor Cody, I welcome—ah! you are, I see here, senor, the renowned scout,

Buffalo Bill—I am proud to know you, senor—Senorita, your obedient servant."

The governor had talked as he read the letter, and in English, for he had answered Bessie Bond in that language.

The two were seated, wine and sweets were ordered, and they were both charmed with the reception given them by a man whom they had heard of as stern and proud.

He did not appear to touch upon the reason of their visit until he had made them feel perfectly at home, and he did this by his very cordial reception.

At last Bessie said, for she saw that he had not read the letter of the colonel, further than to learn who it was that he was to greet:

"If you will glance at the letter of Colonel Loyal, Senor Governor, you will see why I have troubled you with a visit."

"My dear senorita, it is a pleasure I assure you."

"I love your people the Americans and admire them immensely."

"I will, if you will pardon me, see what my friend Loyal says."

He glanced over the letter and then said:

"I see that he tells me that you come upon a most important mission, and which he begs me to lend you my aid in accomplishing."

"He leaves its nature however for you to mention to me, and let me first assure you that any favor you may ask of me I will willingly do all in my power to grant."

"You are most kind, Senor Governor; but may I first ask if Captain Leon Alvarez has been executed yet?"

The maiden and also Buffalo Bill noticed the start the governor gave at this direct question.

"May I ask if you refer to the Captain Alvarez, a conspirator, who was executed nearly two years ago?"

Bessie laughed and replied:

"Pardon me, governor, but as I was the guilty one who had Captain Alvarez rescued from death on that occasion, I know that unless he has been executed within the month past he is still alive, and your prisoner, and your words but more encourage me to believe he is alive."

"Senorita, may I ask what you know of Senor Captain Alvarez?"

"That he was betrayed by a band of four Americans and captured along with his cousin, who, even more treacherous than his foes, delivered him into your hands."

"I do not deny the fact, senorita, I cannot, as it is known to you in some mysterious way."

"Then he is alive?"

"He is."

"And your prisoner?"

"Yes, and now let me say that I believe I recognize in you one of whom I have heard, though the name perhaps I did not learn."

"You are the senorita who once dwelt in Texas, and to whom, pardon me for saying so, Captain Alvarez was engaged?"

"I am, senor."

"You it was who aided the escape of the captain?"

"I but now confessed it, senor."

"Through several Mexican officers who connived at it for certain reasons."

"Senor Governor, I did not corrupt a single Mexican officer in what I did; but I am here to make a clean breast of it."

"I am here to tell you that I was engaged to Captain Alvarez, and that I had reason for knowing that he was no conspirator, that he was guiltless of the charges against him."

"At the time of the conspirators' meeting he was accused of being the leader of, he was at my house, with my mother, my brother and myself."

"He told us that he had discovered a conspiracy which would implicate some of his dearest friends, and cause many who were innocent to suffer, and hence he would simply notify them that their plotting was known and to end all conspiracy meetings at once or they would have to suffer."

"This letter he intrusted to one to deliver who used it against him, for it was not delivered to the conspirators but to the Government."

"You know the result, that Captain Alvarez was accused, tried, found guilty and sentenced to be shot."

"I know it all, senorita," was the low reply of the governor, for his voice was hardly audible.

CHAPTER L.

BESSIE'S APPEAL.

THE governor had listened with rapt attention to the story of Bessie regarding her knowledge of the charges against Captain Alvarez.

When she paused at last he said:

"Senorita, I am more than interested in what you have to say, and have said, so let me ask you to continue to tell me all that you know about this most unfortunate affair."

Thus urged Bessie Bond resumed her story.

"It was upon this letter that Captain Alvarez was arrested and tried."

"Then evidence was brought in against him and implicated others until a great many began to feel that he was guilty."

"The Government took anonymous evidence, or rather communications as evidence, and also the testimony of one who urged, as a payment for what he stated, his name should not be given."

"Let me say to you, senor, that I know who this man was."

"Indeed, senorita?"

"Yes; he was an American, a Texan, one who had served in Mexico at one time as a detective, and who knew many secrets."

"He went to Texas and secured a ranch, and there I met him."

"He claimed to have influence in Mexico, from the secrets he held over officials, and without doubt he did have."

"But he sought to make me his wife, and as I did not love him, regarded him only as a friend, for then I believed him an honorable man, he determined to get rid of Captain Alvarez, who he felt stood in his way."

"He determined also to get rid of the real conspirator, Leon Alvarez, the man who delivered up his cousin to you, and of my mother, who he knew would never consent to my wedding him."

"The result was that the three were arrested at different places, and Captain Alvarez sentenced to death, the other two to imprisonment."

"My brother and Lieutenant Alvarez escaped together, and became miners in New Mexico, while I decided that the man to whom I was engaged should not die."

"To save him I had to sacrifice myself."

"I knew that this Texan had great power, and so I sent for him."

"The result was that I told him if he saved Captain Alvarez from death, he was to come to my house with a priest, and I would become his wife."

"Senorita!" cried the governor-general in amazement.

"This was an outrage, if he demanded it."

The governor spoke indignantly, and Buffalo Bill's face was full of wonder now.

He began to understand the wonderful girl whom he was the guardian of more and more.

"He did hold me to my promise, senor," continued Bessie.

"He went to Mexico, and he was successful in his plot to save Captain Alvarez."

"The commander of the execution and governor were both to blame, senorita."

"I can only say, senor, that the captain was not killed."

"He escaped, was taken out of Mexico by the Texan, sent on his way, and then with the priest, the man who had served him so well, came to my home."

"I kept my pledge, for my mother was away, and we were married."

"That was infamous," said the governor.

"An outrage," muttered Buffalo Bill.

"I sent the man at once from my home, telling him I had kept my promise, but that he was not to claim me within a stated time."

"He was forced to be content, and left me."

"I could not remain in Texas after that, so with my mother sought a home elsewhere."

"Upon our nearing that new home, the one I left to come here, we were halted by road-agents."

"They were a band known as The Deserters, and in their captain was one I recognized as my husband."

"My God!" cried the governor, excitedly.

"He was known as the Deserter Captain, Senor Governor, and he was the vilest of the vile."

"I found that he was living a double life, playing the part of a Mexican gentleman at Fort Beauvoir, and known as Don Eduardo Vincente."

"Ah!"

The exclamation fell from the lips of Buffalo Bill.

"I dared not tell on him, as I wished the secret kept of my being his wife."

"Thus, each held the other in check."

"At last I discerned all that the man was, and that he intended to kidnap a young girl at the fort."

"Then I set to work to aid in hunting him down."

"It was he who furnished the escort for my mother and myself to visit my brother's mining home and grave."

"We returned to our home, and you know the rest, for those who had gone from us were taken by Red Robin and his men, and I learned only by a letter to my chief of cowboys, that Captain Alvarez was your prisoner."

"I at once decided to come here and try to save him from being executed, for I wished to tell you the whole truth upon my honor, feeling that you could not, would not doubt me."

"Upon our way here we met Lieutenant Alvarez and heard his story, which now we know to have been a tissue of lies."

"We then came across Red Robin and he told us the truth we find, and I am glad that we sent the Mexican lieutenant on to my house under his escort, for he will see that he does not escape."

"Now, Senor Governor, you have the story of Captain Alvarez from beginning to end, and I'll vouch upon my honor that he is innocent, and I beg of you to so believe me."

CHAPTER LI.

A FRIEND AT COURT.

BESSIE BOND had spoken in a manner that carried conviction with all she said.

The governor-general had listened, and with an attention that showed his deep interest in her story.

Buffalo Bill was being let into secrets about the fair Belle of Ranch Isle which he had not dreamed of before.

He now saw that she had come to Mexico with a very decided purpose and a well-formed plan of action.

To make her story appear the stronger Buffalo Bill now spoke for the first time and said:

"I wish also to say, senor, that this man who has been the guilty one, has of late been doing all kinds of deeds of devilry in our country, and I have my scouts now hunting for him, for if taken he is to have no mercy shown him."

"That Miss Bond is to be wholly believed also, in her charges against him, the letter from Colonel Loyal will convince you."

"My dear senor, Miss Bond will be believed on her own testimony, though of course what you say and Colonel Loyal has written will have great weight."

"Let me tell you that Captain Alvarez is now a prisoner and in my own quarters."

"Let me tell you that I could hardly believe him to be guilty, with the record he had as a noble soldier."

"When he was brought here by his cousin and the American guard I recognized in him one who had served me well."

"Permit me to tell you the story."

The governor-general then told the story of his rescue by Leon Alvarez, after which he continued as follows:

"Now when I recognized my rescuer as the Conspirator Captain I was determined that he should at least be made comfortable while he lived."

"I gave him a pleasant cell, if one may be so called, and had him supplied with every comfort and good food."

"I visited him and told him of the service he had done me."

"Then back here came your man Red Robin, and I learned of the double treachery of the cousin of Captain Alvarez."

"I had kept the secret of who the captain was from every one, and let only my orderly,

servant and officer of the prison know that I had a prisoner held in durance beneath my roof.

"I did this for a purpose and that was to try and save him.

"At my own expense I set the Secret Service men at work to find out all about this conspiracy and I traced it to Lieutenant, not Captain Alvarez.

"I also discovered that the escape of Captain Alvarez was permitted through the fact that Captain Sebastian who had the execution in charge, was under the control of this Texan, Vincent.

"He was also a conspirator himself, and knew Alvarez to be innocent.

"The surgeon was forced to act from debts which he owed this Texan and from some secret he held of his.

"I have thus tried to find some reason for allowing Captain Alvarez to go free that I might then present a strong plea in his favor to the Government and have the President pardon him and reinstate him in the army with full honor.

"To do this I had to disprove his guilt, and I can do so by getting three persons in my power.

"One of these is Captain Sebastian, the second is Lieutenant Alvarez, and the third is none other than the Texan.

The governor paused and Bessie said quickly:

"I can pledge myself to deliver to you Lieutenant Alvarez."

"And I will give a like pledge to bring to you the Texan, known as the Deserter Captain," added Buffalo Bill.

"Good, and I have Captain Sebastian and the surgeon already under watch and can secure them at any time.

"With these four men brought face to face here in Mexico, I know one, perhaps two of them will confess all the truth to save themselves.

"The surgeon and Captain Sebastian I know will do so, and that will give me a chance at this Deserter Captain and Lieutenant Alvarez.

"Now, Miss Bond, I will promise you to keep Captain Alvarez a prisoner here still, and secretly so.

"I will see that he does not suffer, that he has hope of escape to sustain him, and when I have the men mentioned in my power I shall go to the City of Mexico and lay all the facts I have before the President and the result you can readily guess at."

"Senor Governor, I am happy indeed in having come to Mexico, for I find in you a true friend of Captain Alvarez," said Bessie earnestly.

"Yes, I so wish to be.

"He saved my life, and the Government a great deal of money and some very important papers as well, and this alone should give him a pardon."

"For what he has not been guilty of," said Buffalo Bill.

"Very true, Senor Cody.

"But Captain Alvarez was sentenced to death as a conspirator, and he therefore will have to be pardoned.

"Then his innocence can be made known and honors bestowed upon him for what he has suffered, while the guilty shall be punished.

"Now, senorita, let me also promise, if I get hold of that Texan, to make a widow of you in very short order.

"May I ask you to be my guest while you remain in my military district?"

But this kind invitation was refused, and after one night at the hotel to rest, Bessie and her escort started upon their return to the United States.

CHAPTER LII.

THE TEMPTATION.

WHEN Red Robin started upon his trail with his prisoner, he well knew that he had a very big undertaking on his hands.

Neither he nor the prisoner were any too well mounted, and it would be a good three days' ride before Ranch Isle was reached.

The Mexican was a brave man he knew, and as cunning as a fox, while he was as dangerous as a panther.

To carry him in safety to Ranch Isle would be all that he could do.

It was true that his life would be the forfeit if he allowed the prisoner the slightest advantage over him.

If he got him in safety to Ranch Isle, then his reward would be the money paid him and his comrades by the governor-general and his own escape from being treated as an outlaw.

The stakes were well worth playing for.

On the trail as they went along the Mexican was at first very silent.

But at last he said, by way of opening the negotiations he had in view:

"I say, Red Robin, you feel very bitter toward me, I suppose?"

"I do."

"You would like to see me hanged I think?"

"Naw, I would be pleased ter see yer strung up."

"I have done you no real harm, for you did not die of the poison, and you'll get your money back again."

"It wasn't your fault I didn't die, or that I'll git my money back, for you tried to kill me and did git my money."

"I took you through Mexico so you could get your money, where you could not have gone without me."

"I will grant that one thing in your favor."

"Now, you wish to make money do you not?"

"That's what I'm on earth for, and what you tried to put me out of the way for."

"Now I am rich, and—"

"You came very near getting rich off of me."

"But I was in the mines with my cousin and we made a snug little sum."

"Where is it?"

"Hidden away."

"Where?"

"In New Mexico."

"Waal?"

"If you will go there with me I will divide it between us."

"How much has you got there?"

"About twenty thousand dollars."

"As much as that?"

"More, if anything."

"Waal, what's your game?"

"You take the back trail for New Mexico, and when we reach the place where our money is concealed, I will divide equally."

"You mean if I lets you go?"

"Yes."

"I won't do it."

"I'll give you two-thirds."

"No."

"Well, life is dear to me, so I will give you all of it."

"No."

"I have nothing else to give."

"You hain't got that."

"But I can get it."

"You can't do it."

"Why?"

"If you had had any money hidden away, you'd hev come through New Mexico and picked it up."

"No, you are giving me a grand bluff, and I don't nibble until I sees the bait."

"You hain't got no money or you'd show up, and now I think of it, I'll not let you go if you have ever so much, for if you dies I'm bound to be your heir."

The Mexican bitterly cursed the outlaw for his words and a long silence fell between them.

After awhile, however, the Mexican asked:

"Do you intend to take me to Ranch Isle?"

"That is what I am here for."

"And you will deliver those letters?"

"I'll do it."

"Now see here, if you'll go there with me, having taken off my irons, and let me tell my story, I'll make you a rich man."

"How?"

"I know where Mrs. Bond and Bessie keep their treasure hidden."

"And you'd rob 'em?"

"They have plenty more."

"Waal, that young lady was too nice ter me, as was her mother when we tuk 'em South, for me ter play any game on 'em."

"No, sir, I'm on ther war-path ter take you to the Ranch Isle, and thar yer goes, while they shall all larn that you is the most honorary cuss I has ever seen."

"When yer is know'd for what yer is, it's

my opinion that yer'll be hanged by 'her cowboys, without judge or jury a-sitting on your case ter try it."

But with all this, the Mexican tried scheme after scheme to get the outlaw to release him.

Appeals, promises, threats and bribes were all of no avail however, for Red Robin was firm as a rock.

He could not be tempted, and plainly said so, adding:

"Now yer is jist a-wasting precious breath a-talkin' ter me, pard, and as yer hasn't got any more breath than will last yer fer a short while, yer better check up beseechin' me and try some other game ter win, for it won't go a little bit and don't you forgit it."

Thus urged the Mexican kept silent until they halted for dinner.

Then the prisoner wished to have his hands set free so that he could eat, he said.

"So yer kin shoot, I guess."

"But yer don't git free and so yer might as well sliet up."

The dinner over they resumed their way and so continued on until night fell, when the outlaw sought a good camping-place.

He secured his prisoner after supper in a most novel manner, for he cut a sapling, fastened his hands to it, then his feet, the two ends extending some distance above the head and below his feet, and preventing him from rising and walking.

"Now, pard, I'll see to the horses and then we goes ter sleep, for I doesn't intend ter lose no rest on your account."

The Mexican sighed, but when Red Robin awoke in the morning his prisoner was there.

CHAPTER LIII.

AT RANCH ISLE.

THE departure of Bessie for Mexico was greatly felt by Mrs. Bond, for she knew all of the dangers and hardships she must pass through with upon her long journey.

Had it not been that she was to go under the protection of Buffalo Bill, Mrs. Bond would never have yielded to Bessie's wish to go, for though the daughter's will governed all, yet in this case the mother would have been firm.

With Bessie under the guardianship of Buffalo Bill, however, Mrs. Bond felt that she would be as safe as it was possible for her to be.

The mother would have gone with her daughter, but she felt unequal to the journey.

The other long trail to New Mexico had about broken her down so that she dared not attempt a longer and harder expedition which the trail into Mexico would certainly be.

She had accordingly remained at home, and it was with a sad heart she went about her duties.

Manning Mayhew, the new cowboy chief, was glad to take all care off of Mrs. Bond's shoulders, so was going night and day in his endeavor to do so.

The cattle were rounded up and the young ones branded, the horses also, and improvements were made about the ranch wherever they were needed.

It was the desire of Cowboy Mayhew to have Bessie find a great change for the better upon her return.

A small log fort was built at the place where Idaho Ike had seen the half-breed cross and recross the river and two cowboys were kept there on duty, with a signal agreed upon in case danger of an attack came from that point.

The main stockade across the neck of land was made higher by logs being laid on top of the heavy wall, and in other ways the place was strengthened, while a cowboy was kept constantly on duty day and night, for it would not do to be surprised by a force of Indians which Mayhew feared either the Deserter Captain or the half-breed Mexican might bring against them.

The cowboy chief soon proved his worth as a manager and his value as a friend, and Mrs. Bond was frank enough to tell him she felt perfectly safe under his care, while the cowboys all admitted that they held perfect confidence in him.

Thus matters stood ten days after the departure of Bessie Bond for Mexico.

One afternoon Banjo Bob who was on sen-

tinel duty outside, signaled that some one was approaching.

At once all were in readiness to greet friend or foe, and soon after two horsemen appeared in sight, coming toward the stockade.

As they drew nearer they were seen to be a sorry-looking pair and Banjo Bob showed that he did not even consider them dangerous enough to halt, but rode on with them.

When they approached the stockade gate Manning Mayhew called out in surprise:

"Why, one is Red Robin and the other Lieutenant Alvarez."

"What's left of me, Pard Mayhew, I am," was the response of Red Robin as he drew rein.

It was now seen that the Mexican was a prisoner, his wrists being ironed together, and though his face was white and hard in expression, that of Red Robin was gashed and sorry-looking.

"What do you want here, Red Robin?" sternly asked Mayhew.

"Don't git yer mad up, cap'n, for I was sent here by Miss Bessie, and I has a letter for you and the missus."

"Its false, he forged the letters he has, and he made me a prisoner with the rest of his gang who are not far away."

"He came here to spy about to see if he could raid your place."

"Come, friend Mayhew, you know me well, so set me free, for this man intends to kill me."

The Mexican spoke earnestly and with an air of truth.

Red Robin looked at him with an expression of dazed amazement.

He could not really believe his prisoner had said what he did.

But recovering quickly, as he saw the Mexican's words had had their effect upon the cowboys, he said:

"Now look here, Pard Mayhew, you knows I can commit no forgery on Miss Bessie's writing, and there is her letter to you and I has another for her mother, while let me tell yer candid like, this Dago is my prisoner and I has had a parrot and a monkey time of it all the way."

"Six days ago I parted with Buffalo Bill and Miss Bessie on ther trail, and I was ter bring this Dago here and tarn him over ter you."

"First he tried ter tempt me with money, then ter scare me with threats, and two nights ago he jumped on me when I was asleep and got in his work on my head with his irons."

"Jist look at my face how he mutilated it, and he mighty nigh called in my chips too."

"Then he played sick, next he come the fainting dodge and thought he would worry me out."

"But here I is, and here he be, and that is all I has ter say about it jist now."

"But when yer has got this Dago fixed, so I kin catch up with a leetle sleep, I has ter tell yer ther whole story, sergeant, since we parted with yer in New Mexico, and treated yer that bad, and for which I is mighty sorry, axing yer pardon for it."

"Well, Red Robin, for once I believe you have truth on your side, for these letters are no forgeries I am sure, and you, Lieutenant Alvarez, must remain a prisoner, as this letter from Miss Bond demands it," said Manning Mayhew sternly, and every ray of hope seemed to fade from the heart of Leon Alvarez at his words.

CHAPTER LIV.

COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE.

THERE was a certain uneasiness pervading all classes at Fort Beauvoir.

Colonel Loyal felt a certain dread at the absence of his chief of scouts Buffalo Bill, and regret that Bessie Bond had undertaken the long and perilous journey to Mexico.

Then too he was worried that Surgeon Powell had gone off to shadow the half-breed Mexican in the hope that he would lead him to the Deserter Captain.

He knew that he had an able ally in Dashing Charlie, but he feared that the anxiety of the Surgeon Scout to capture the Deserter Captain would lead him into greater danger than he could extricate himself from.

Then there were, with Buffalo Bill, Texas

Jack and Buckskin Sam, and with Dashing Charlie Surgeon Powell, so that his very best scouts were absent in case of a raid by the red-skins, and Colonel Loyal constantly anticipated an attack from the Deserter Captain.

Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk had, as told to do by Surgeon Powell, made his report of what had taken place in the Devil's Acre, when the beautiful Keno Kate had been caught cheating, and Colonel Loyal was very much surprised at what he heard.

That the half-breed cowboy of Ranch Isle had come to the settlement, and appeared to be in league with Emerald Ed was another surprise to Colonel Loyal.

Of course having heard from Bessie just what had occurred, he felt it was but wise to have an eye kept upon the man, and he was glad that the noted Surgeon Scout was the one who had that eye upon him.

He had said to Captain Taylor:

"Powell sees something in that fellow's movements to carry him away from the fort, and he could have taken no better man with him than Dashing Charlie, for they are a great pair for a trail, Taylor."

"They are indeed, sir; but Powell had it reported around that he was on the sick list, and somehow the story has gone out that he is not ill, but on a trail."

"I am sorry for that."

"Who could have let it be known, do you think?"

"I do not know, sir, and I am anxious to find out, for the one that did do so must be either a fool or friendly to the outlaw element, and in either case it would be well to know who he is, sir."

"It certainly would be, Captain Taylor; but somehow I feel very anxious about both Doctor Powell and Buffalo Bill."

"I have felt the same way, sir."

"Buffalo Bill's work now is out of the usual run, for it takes him and his men into Mexico, a country by no means friendly to our people, and I do not know what the upshot will be."

"Then, too, there is Powell, gone now over a week, and nothing heard from him or of Dashing Charlie, who followed him, as you know."

"Yes, sir; but I can take a few scouts and go and look them up."

"No, it would not be well, and Lieutenant Onderdonk made the same request."

"But it might interfere with some move of Powell's which we know nothing of."

"The truth is that Frank Powell is either in trouble or has some clew he is following up, and he cannot spare Dashing Charlie to send me word."

"I suppose we can only wait, sir."

"Yes, it is all we can do; but I heard from one of the scouts that he had struck a fresh trail of two horses several days ago going to Ranch Isle."

"He followed it to the ranch and noted that it turned in there, but he saw no one to make any inquiries of."

"Can it be that two of the Buffalo Bill party have returned, sir?"

"I do not know, and I should like to find out."

"Permit me to ride over there, sir, and see what the trail means."

"Do so, please, Captain Taylor, and take a couple of men with you, for we cannot spare our good men now, and there is something dangerous now in the aspect of affairs—at least it appears so to me."

Captain Taylor called for a scout and a soldier, and at once started for Ranch Isle.

He reached the ranch early in the afternoon, and was at once received by Mrs. Bond most cordially.

"The colonel felt anxious, Mrs. Bond, as he heard of a trail coming from the southward to your ranch, and thought you might have news of Miss Bessie, so sent me over."

"Yes, I had a note from my daughter, sent by a man met on the trail," answered Mrs. Bond.

As she did not offer to explain more, the captain said:

"I hope all went well with Miss Bessie?"

"Oh, yes, she met two men who were with us on the trip to New Mexico, and so wrote me by one of them, but it was of a private nature merely, or I should have sent word to the fort about it."

Captain Taylor saw that there was nothing for him to learn, and as there was nothing

wrong with the party on the trail to Mexico, he soon took his leave and returned to the fort.

But to Colonel Loyal he said:

"I am sure that there was something which Mrs. Bond wished to hide, for she said nothing more about the two men, as to whether they were still at the ranch or not, while to neither the soldier or scout was mention made of their arrival at the place."

"Yes, there is a mystery about the whole affair which I wish was cleared up," responded Captain Loyal.

CHAPTER LV.

THE TWO SHADOWS.

SURGEON POWELL and Dashing Charlie reached a position where they could see the flag flying in the valley, and which they knew Half-Breed Harry had placed there.

"Charlie."

"Yes, sir."

"You must wait here and see if the signal is answered."

"Yes, sir."

"I will flank around to the head of the valley and see if the White Spirit of the Mountains comes out to answer the signal."

"And if he does, sir?"

"I will be in the mountains to note his coming back and follow him, while you can take a look after the Mexican."

"A good idea, Surgeon Powell."

"It may be that the half-breed is trying to communicate with the Sioux through the old Hermit."

"He is one of their chiefs, I have heard sir."

"He may, or may not be that, but certain it is that he has unbounded influence with the red-skins from some reason."

"And is no renegade?"

"Well, he has always protected the whites, and will never let the Sioux harm them if he can help it."

"Yes, sir, he did so when you were besieged at Trapper's Mound."

"He did and rescued us well."

"Now, the retreat of the old trapper and hunter Dennis is not but half a day's travel from here, and if we need more aid I can get him."

"He is a good one, sir."

"None better, as I have had reason to know— Ah! there comes a man now out of the timber at the base of the foot-hills," and Surgeon Powell turned his glass upon the form he had discovered.

He took but a short glance and said:

"It is the Hermit, and he is coming to answer the signal."

"You remain here and watch the result, while I flank around and try and head him off on his way back."

"If the half-breed returns with him, sir?"

"Then you cannot follow until night, as you would be seen crossing the valley, and I will be on the spot to watch them, so will meet you at night."

"All right, sir; you had better leave me the pack-horse as you will wish to travel rapidly to get around the head of the valley."

"I will do so, Charlie."

"Keep your glass upon them, noting every move."

"If the Hermit should not go back, sir, but go with the half-breed?"

"That I must keep an eye on, by coming to take a look down the valley as often as I can, and in that case I will join you here again."

With this understanding Surgeon Powell went back to where the horses were, mounted and rode away.

He kept on along the top of the ridge and now and then dismounted and went to the edge of the timber to take a view down the valley.

He saw on one of these trips the old Hermit moving on toward the signal.

At the other time he discovered that he had reached the flag and the half-breed was with him.

A third time he dismounted and ran to the edge of the timber.

The flag was no longer flying, the staff was down and the White Spirit of the Mountains and the half-breed were going together

toward the mountains, the Mexican mounted and leading his pack-horse and the Hermit walking and showing the way.

"I must hasten on around to the mountains or I will be too late."

So he returned to his horse, mounted and rode on rapidly as the nature of the ground would permit.

When he again had a glimpse at the valley the Hermit and the half-breed had disappeared.

But the Surgeon Scout pressed on, and after a ride of several miles came to a good place to leave his horse, for he dared not continue on further mounted.

The spot was the very hiding-place for a horse and he was quickly unsaddled and staked out to feed, while the Doctor Detective continued on his way on foot, hoping to cross the trail of the two men and keeping a bright watch as he went along for the tracks of the horses of the half-breed.

He had gone but a short distance when he suddenly started back into a clump of bushes, for he heard the ring of an iron shoe against rock.

There, not three hundred yards from him were those he looked for.

The half-breed was dismounted now and leading one horse, the Hermit ahead leading the other, for the ground was very rough just there.

They passed on up the mountain and Frank Powell followed them, but not too close, for it would not do to be seen then.

He also had the trail of the horses to follow, and this he kept upon.

After a walk of a mile he once more came in sight of the party.

They were in the open space spoken of, staking out the two horses.

The Surgeon Scout watched their movements from their hiding-place and saw them continue on, on foot.

"They are going to the Hermit's retreat," he muttered.

"It is said that no one ever could find the way there, but his taking the half-breed with him proves that they are allies."

"Well, I will be an uninvited guest, but I go too."

CHAPTER LVI.

TO THE END.

WITH the firm resolve to go on to the end, lead where the trail might, Surgeon Powell followed after the Hermit and the half-breed.

He watched ahead with the greatest caution in case the two should look back and catch sight of him, or come to a halt.

The trail led up the mountain for nearly a mile, after leaving the two horses, and the shadower saw before him, as he went around a boulder, the Hermit and the Mexican.

"What are they doing?" he muttered, noticing the strange movements of the men.

After watching them for a moment the surgeon muttered to himself:

"As I live, the old Hermit is blindfolding the Mexican."

Seeing this done the shadower crept nearer and saw the Hermit suddenly raise the half-breed in his arms, sling him upon his back and move on as though he did not feel the weight.

"Ah! that man is a giant in strength."

"Not so old as he looks, to do that."

"Why, the weight of the Mexican he does not seem to feel."

"As the Hermit has to keep his eyes on his course now, and the other is blindfolded I need not be so cautious."

With this Frank Powell pushed more rapidly on and caught up quite close to the Hermit who had turned short off from the trail and was climbing the mountain.

Suddenly he disappeared between two boulders, and when the shadower, after approaching with the greatest caution, reached the place, he saw a well-like aperture in the ground.

Down this he knew the Hermit had gone, so he climbed down also and found himself in a cavern, the opening of which the shelving rock of the hole had completely hidden. Just inside the cabin were a number of pine torches and a tin box of matches.

Going along the tunnel, or cavern as far as the light permitted, the Surgeon Scout saw that it led upward and doubtless continued on for a considerable distance.

"Well, this is the way the Hermit goes to his den in the mountain top, and I do not wonder no one ever discovered it."

"He was very careful that the half-breed should not find it either, and I would never have done so had I not seen him enter it."

The Surgeon Scout now deliberated awhile, and then made up his mind to go back and await the coming of Dashing Charlie.

"I hope he will come around as I did, having seen them move off so soon, for if he awaits until night, then it will be hard for us, I fear."

Reaching the horses of the half-breed, Surgeon Powell looked them over, glanced at their outfit, and then continued on to where he had left his own animal.

He had just saddled and bridled him when the action of the horse told him there was some one near.

"What is it, old fellow?" he asked, and he hunted cover.

A few moments after Dashing Charlie rode into view.

"By Jove, Charlie, but I am glad to see you," cried the surgeon, advancing from his place of concealment.

"Well, sir, I concluded as I saw them start for the mountains not to wait, for as the half-breed took his pack-horse, it proved he was not coming back immediately, and I took your trail to come right on," answered the scout.

"The very thing that I hoped you would do, for I have found the Hermit's den."

"Good! and our horses?"

"We will leave them further up the mountain, where there is a better place, and where the half-breed has left his."

The surgeon led the way on up the mountain to the open, where the Mexican's horses were staked out.

"Put ours here, too, Charlie, for when that half-breed comes out of the den of the Hermit I want him."

"You will capture him then, sir?"

"Yes, for he has come here, I am sure, to play some game that we must find out."

"He either is sending a message to the Deserter Captain, or for a band of Indians, or maybe he has come here to meet the outlaw chief."

"Whatever his motive, I shall know, and if the old Hermit is in league with him, I wish to know that also."

"I'm with you, Surgeon Powell, whether it is a fight, foot-race, or hanging-match."

"I know that, Charlie; but now let us see what this fellow has among his traps."

These were looked over, and both the surgeon and Dashing Charlie appeared surprised at their discovery.

In the first place, there was a map showing just how to reach the Hermit's home on the cliffs, or rather the vicinity of it, and marking where the signal flag was to be set.

The directions were written in a bold hand, which the Surgeon Scout seemed to think were very familiar, and what was more, they were upon the back of a sutler's bill at the fort, and made out to Emerald Ed.

"I had a note from Emerald Ed once, Charlie, and this is his writing, so you see he is in the toils in some way himself, as you supposed."

"Now let us look to our weapons, and go on the trail to the Hermit's cabin, for there we will find both of them."

"Without doubt, sir, and it will be two against two, with the odds of a surprise in our favor."

"Yes, now come," and the Shadowers went on up the mountain on the Hermit's trail.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE UNDERGROUND TRAIL.

WHEN Surgeon Powell turned off from the regular mountain trail and began to climb up the steep side of the rocks, Dashing Charlie could not understand just what he intended to do, so said:

"The trail runs on up the mountain, sir."

"Yes, the regular trail made by wild beasts in ascending and descending the mountain, Charlie."

"And you are on another, sir."

"Yes, I am tracking the Hermit."

"And the half breed, sir?"

"No, for he was carried on the back of the Hermit up this way."

"I do not see the sign of any trail, sir, along here."

"No, for there is no trail."

"The Hermit wears moccasins and this is solid rock."

"But, come on, for I have a surprise for you."

Dashing Charlie followed in silence, and the Surgeon Scout led the way up to where the hole in the rocks was visible.

He did not say anything and Charlie Emmett, after a glance into the aperture, stood waiting for the surgeon to continue.

"Well, Charlie, what do you see?"

"Only that hole, sir."

"How deep is it?"

After looking closely, the scout answered: "About ten feet, sir, I should think."

"What made it?"

"I suppose it is a water wash, sir, from the mountain torrents in wet weather."

"Yes, that is it; but when as good a scout as you are can be deceived, as I would have been also, I do not wonder that the Hermit considers himself securely hidden."

"This is the way we go, Charlie, so come along."

With this the Surgeon Scout dropped down into the hole and Dashing Charlie followed.

Then, under the shelving water-worn rock, he beheld a cavernous opening some three feet high and half as many in width.

Into this opening the surgeon went, Charlie close behind him. They found themselves in a cavern in which both could stand upright, and which a pair of horses could readily pass through.

There upon the shelf of rock were the pine torches and tin box of matches.

"Everything is ready at hand for us, Charlie," said the surgeon, pointing with a smile to the pine sticks and matches.

"Yes, sir: we have all the luxuries."

"We'll light one and go ahead, and you bring a number of them for use on the way. No telling how far we shall have to tramp."

With torch in hand they moved on and upward, and found that the cavern ran with the regularity of an artificial tunnel, and strangely even in size.

It seemed an interminable way, but at last the surgeon suddenly put out the torch, for ahead he had caught a glimmer of daylight.

Then the two moved on most cautiously, and after a walk of a hundred steps came to the other end of the tunnel-like cavern.

What they saw amazed them, for this tunnel narrowed at the end to the size of a small window and looked into a cabin beyond.

The Surgeon Scout touched Dashing Charlie upon the arm and the two stepped far back in the shadow of the cave.

There was a blanket hanging over the entrance to the cavern, but drawn back upon one side like a curtain, so that the two Shadowers could see into the room beyond very distinctly.

What they beheld were the two persons in the cabin just rising from their dinner.

These were the old Hermit and the half-breed, the latter now no longer blindfolded.

The voices of the two were distinctly heard, for the cavern seemed to carry the sound very distinctly back into its recesses.

What the Shadowers also saw were the panther and two wolves standing just outside the open door, evidently waiting for their dinner.

The view from the open door beyond revealed the cliff and the valley beyond, with the hills far away in the distance where the Shadowers had first seen the signal flag from.

Tossing the animals something to eat the Hermit had lighted his pipe and told the Mexican that they would go outside and talk.

"Charlie."

"Yes, sir."

"We must hear what they have to say."

"Yes, sir, we must."

"It will be risky work."

"On account of the panther and the wolves which the old man has as pets?"

"Yes."

"We can slip into the cabin, sir, and I will take position behind the door, so as to close it quickly if need be, and if we have to shut them out we have matters all our own way."

"Yes especially if we can first hear what they have to say."

The voices outside were heard, and the panther and the wolves had gone off to lie down after their meal.

So, with a revolver in their right hands the two Shadows slipped into the cabin, and while Dashing Charlie took position behind the door the Surgeon Scout stood to one side.

Without, not over ten feet from them, sat the Hermit and the half-breed, and all that was said between the two was distinctly heard by the Surgeon Scout and Dashing Charlie.

"Now will I act," muttered the surgeon, giving a significant look across to Dashing Charlie to be ready.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A CAUSE OF ALARM.

For some reason the Faro Fairy had not drawn custom to her bank, as was her wont.

She had been too lucky, the players said, for them to risk money against her.

She was therefore idle most of the night, only now and then a miner dropping in and playing at her table, who was reckless from drink or had the temerity to trust to his luck to win against her.

Of course the taverns where the card-players were paid their regular percentage to Emerald Ed, and drinks and cigars at a big profit, brought in ample money to Emerald Ed, so that he was not actually losing.

But then Keno Kate had always been such a source of revenue that when she did not get suckers to bite at her bait, they were missed sadly.

For this reason there was another council held between the two, Keno Kate and Emerald Ed, after they left the Devil's Acre one night.

They were in an ill-humor both of them, and this time the man went to the cabin of the Faro Fairy.

It was well surrounded by a stockade, a comfortable cabin, and built against the cliff, not far from Emerald Ed's home.

The way the gambler went to Keno Kate's quarters was not outside, and through the stockade gate, but back through an opening in the rear of his room, which led into a cave.

A tunnel-way ran from this to a cave in the rear of Keno Kate's quarters.

When Emerald Ed entered the cabin of the woman he found her pacing the floor.

She had changed the gorgeous attire she wore at night in the Devil's Acre and was in a pretty dressing-gown.

Her face was pale and anxious, and she said sharply:

"I tell you, Ed, this life is killing me."

"I must be careful or it will kill me, and at the rope-end too," was his answer as he dropped into a chair, a cigar between his lips.

"How much longer is it going to last, Ed?"

"I do not know, Kate."

"Well, I must know, for I am losing all my beauty by worrying."

"Just consider the situation, Ed, and you will pity me, if you have any pity in your heart."

"What do you wish me to consider, Kate?"

"That, the daughter of a gambler, who did not wish me to know of his life, I was given every advantage of education."

"My father was killed and then I discovered that his property had been made by gambling."

"My brother avenged my father's death, as you know, but was forced to fly from justice and I went with him."

"Then I met you and became your wife, the wife of a gambler as well as the daughter and sister of one."

"You have never acknowledged me as your wife, even when you brought me here to this settlement to live."

"I am known as Keno Kate the Faro Fairy, and that is all."

"I have never yet heard myself addressed by my husband's name."

"Well, I have loved you and hence I have obeyed you."

"I knew that you were a great sinner, Ed, and yet have I continued to love you."

"At last you got me to turn gambler, and my skin with cards caused you to make me

what these people call the Faro Fairy, and, to get money for you I have lowered my very soul to cheating."

"Twice have I been detected in it, and I can clearly see that the coil is tightening about us, and that soon must end in your death and my imprisonment, yes, and in the hanging too of my brother Henrico."

"Oh, Ed! listen to my appeal now, before it is too late, and let us fly from here, for I know what will be the end but too well."

"You are a rich man, so let that suffice, without waiting for more."

"Rich, you say?" sneered Emerald Ed, who had listened in silence, thus far, to the woman.

"Yes, you can command all of fifty thousand dollars outside of the sale of the Devil's Acre."

"What is that when I expected to get so much more."

"It is better to get away with what you have, and your life, than to lose all and your life."

"Well, Kate, I have several schemes on hand to put through yet!"

"They will work your ruin."

"Not a bit of it."

"Be warned, Ed."

"I will await the return of Harry, and see what we are to get out of that."

"Then comes the kidnapping of Bessie Bond, and that will pay us ten thousand ransom money."

"Next, and last, will be the kidnapping of Madge, the heiress, or one of the Englishmen, and that should pay twenty thousand, or more."

"In the meanwhile I'll sell out Devil's Acre to the storekeeper, Pellam, for all I can get for it in cash, and then we can go our way, you, Harry, and myself, with fortune enough to support us, and to make more with."

"This is what I intend to do, Kate, and argument against it is useless, so try and rake in all the shekels you can between now and leaving time, and we will keep our intended going a secret."

"I wish you would go when Harry returns, for delays are dangerous, and it will be no easy task to capture either Bessie Bond or Madge Burton."

"I have mapped out my plan of action for you, Kate, and that ends all argument," was the stern response of Emerald Ed.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE SCOUTS' RETURN.

It was with a very light heart that Bessie Bond started upon the return home, after her interview with the governor-general.

She felt cheered, as did also Buffalo Bill, at the result of their visit, for it made known to them the fact that they had a friend in the man they had stood most in awe of.

"Well, Buffalo Bill, what do you think of the governor-general?" asked Bessie when the party were upon the return trail the morning after seeing the governor.

"I think, Miss Bessie, that he has been very much maligned, for though he has been noted as a daring and skillful officer he has also been said to be very severe, almost cruel, for I have heard Buckskin Sam and Texas Jack speak of him time and again."

"Yes, he is a stern man but a just and generous one."

"Before I left this morning he sent me this, Miss Bessie," and Buffalo Bill took out a paper which was a pass for himself and party through the Mexican Territory and an order to all officers and soldiers to give them all the aid within their power.

"That was very kind of him indeed, and it may be of service to us."

"But do you not believe he will aid Captain Alvarez to escape, if he feels that there is no hope of a pardon for him?"

"That is just my idea, Miss Bessie, for you know that he has not let the presence of the captain be known to any one other than it was necessary should know it."

"Yes, and that is what fills me with hope."

"It is hopeful indeed, Miss Bessie."

"Now, Buffalo Bill, as to keeping our pledge to the general."

"About the Deserter Captain and Lieutenant Alvarez?"

"Yes."

"Well, you have the latter a prisoner now, if Red Robin got safely to Ranch Isle with him."

"Yes, and we must in some way get possession of the Deserter Captain."

"Yes, but you forget that we set one upon his trail who will get him if any one on earth can."

"Surgeon Powell?"

"Yes, miss."

"I somehow believe that he will capture the man."

"He will if the Deserter Captain has not left the frontier, Miss Bessie."

"He will not do that as long as he has a chance to make a dollar, or rather steal it, or to get his revenge, as he calls it, upon all of us."

"He has had a remarkable life, Miss Bessie, and can be hanged upon a dozen different charges."

"Yes, as a Mexican Secret Service man he committed many crimes, and again as the Texan Edward Vincent."

"Then as Don Eduardo Vincente he was guilty of other criminal acts and also as the Deserter Captain, so there should be no escape for him."

"He has been a renegade white chief of the Sioux as well, Miss Bessie, and in fact he should be hanged without trial."

"But must be taken to Mexico and given up to the captain-general."

"If that can be arranged, for you know it would hardly do if the colonel knew of it."

"The colonel, knowing of it, and the circumstances of what his being given up would do for Captain Alvarez, would, I think, be willing to yield him to me to send to Mexico."

"If he could, Miss Bessie, but military law is peculiar, and has to be governed by a very large amount of red tape."

"The colonel would do all he could, even stretch his power, but it would take a *requisition* from Mexico to the President to get the man there if the colonel had possession of him."

"I only wish we had thought of this before leaving."

"Why, Miss Bessie?"

"To ask Surgeon Powell to keep his prisoner in hiding, if he captured him."

"We did not know that the governor-general wanted him, Miss Bessie; but we will arrange it if we have to let him escape and recapture him."

"You are so good, Buffalo Bill."

"Well, Miss Bessie, we must do anything to save that gallant Captain Alvarez, and—"

"And what?" asked Bessie, as the scout hesitated.

With a smile Buffalo Bill responded:

"And give the governor-general a chance to make you a widow, Miss Bessie, as he seemed anxious to do."

"Well, I cannot say that I will feel sorry enough to put on mourning for my departed husband," was the reply, with some bitterness, for Bessie Bond could not but feel the intensest hatred for the man to whom she had been so strangely wedded.

On the way back Buffalo Bill set a good pace, and their last camp on Mexican soil was in the very place where Lieutenant Alvarez had encamped with his victims.

There were the graves of the dead, just as Red Robin had described them to Buffalo Bill.

Once they had crossed the border, though the danger was greater from the fear of falling in with red-skins, all felt greatly relieved, and the trail was followed with lighter hearts from the feeling of being once more upon the soil of their own land.

In half a day less than the trip to Mexico had been made, they reached Ranch Isle, and were met with a rousing welcome by Manning Mayhew and his cowboys.

CHAPTER LX.

STILL ABSENT.

MANNING MAYHEW had been going the rounds of the ranch before nightfall, when his eyes fell upon a party of horsemen in the distance.

They were upon the trail that could only bring them to Ranch Isle, and a second glance told him that the large man with

flowing locks who rode ahead of the others, was Buffalo Bill.

Suddenly to the side of the chief of scouts, rode Bessie Bond, and quickly Manning Mayhew gave the signal to all of his men to assemble at the stockade gate and give the party a welcome upon their return.

In twenty minutes after, up rode the party of wanderers, their horses well tired out from the long jaunt, and the riders even looking haggard and travel stained.

Bessie shook hands with each one of the cowboys, and then dashed on up to the cabin to see her mother who had heard the cheer of greeting.

"Oh, my child!

"Thank Heaven, you are back again.

"But, you did not go after all."

"Indeed we did go, mother, and saw the governor-general, too."

"So soon?"

"Why, I did not expect you for days yet."

But Bessie's first question then was:

"Did Red Robin arrive?"

"Yes."

"And his prisoner?"

"Yes, Bessie."

"He has not escaped?"

"Oh, no, that would be impossible with such a person to look after him as Mayhew."

"But Red Robin sits up with the prisoner all night, and sleeps by day, so you did not see him when you arrived."

"But, Bessie, can it be all true what this man tells of Lieutenant Alvarez?"

"My dear mother, you have not heard the half of his acts of devilry."

"You always said that he was a villain, Bessie."

"I knew it, intuitively."

"But I have so much to tell you, mother, after I have relieved my mind by asking you a few questions."

"I will answer all that I can, Bessie," said Mrs. Bond, with a smile.

"Well, first, mother, when did you hear from the fort?"

"Lieutenant Onderdonk was over yesterday, and Captain Taylor a short while before."

"Have they captured the Deserter Captain?"

"No, Bessie, and all are in the greatest distress about Surgeon Powell."

"What has happened to him, mother?"

"He went off upon a trail some time after your departure, and Dashing Charlie followed him with a pack-horse, it seems, as though they were to be gone some time."

"Have they not returned yet?"

"They had not yesterday, when Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk was here, and all are in great trouble over it."

"Mother, it was upon the trail of Half-Breed Harry that Surgeon Powell went."

"Well, the half-breed went to the settlement for several days, and then departed, and he has not been seen since."

"But Surgeon Powell is also absent?"

"Yes."

"Well, he is after Half-Breed Harry, shadowing him so as to find the Deserter Captain."

"But he has been gone so long, Bessie."

"Is not Dashing Charlie with him?"

"It is supposed that he is."

"Why did not the colonel send out a scout to trail them?"

"He intended doing so, but a storm came up, and the hard rain destroyed all trace of the trails."

"Well, I have always an abounding faith that the Surgeon Scout can take care of himself against all odds, mother, and as Dashing Charlie is also with him, I do not feel much fear of the result; but rather, I may say, it looks to me as though his long stay meant his success."

"I will talk it over with Buffalo Bill, though, and hear what he says, for he and his scouts are going to stay at the ranch tonight, and go on to the fort in the morning."

Buffalo Bill soon after came up to the cabin with Manning Mayhew, and both joined Mrs. Bond and Bessie at supper, and the long absence of the Surgeon Scout was talked over.

"What is your opinion, Mr. Cody?" asked Mrs. Bond.

"I do not believe that Frank Powell has been led into a trap, and yet he is human, and might be."

"Dashing Charlie, too, is one of the best men upon the border, and they would be a dangerous pair for any half-dozen men to corral."

"I would like to get at the facts of the case, and just the trail which they were known to have taken."

"I will go at once to the fort and—"

"No, Miss Bessie, let me go, for you are tired out, as I can see," Mayhew remarked.

"One minute, Miss Bessie, for I have a plan."

"Yes, Buffalo Bill."

"Let Mr. Mayhew go, and find out all he can for us."

"But he must not tell of our return from Mexico, and when he comes back we will get a fresh mount of horses from your ranch and go upon the trail, my four boys and myself, to try and find Surgeon Powell."

"As it will not be known that we have gotten back, if we find that Doctor Powell has shadowed his man to the end of his trail, why we can bring the prisoner here instead of taking him to the fort, and Mr. Mayhew can start to Mexico with him and the lieutenant, taking four of the ranch cowboys as a guard and Red Robin as a guide."

"In this way we will avoid complications through the giving up of the Deserter Captain to the Mexicans, yes, and the lieutenant also."

This plan of Buffalo Bill was considered a good one and was acted upon at once.

Mounted upon a fleet horse, Manning Mayhew rode rapidly to the fort, while Buffalo Bill and his tired men retired to their blankets to get what rest they could before starting upon another trail, and which might prove to be a very long one.

CHAPTER LXI.

ON THE SHADOWERS' TRAIL.

It was late at night when the cowboy chief returned to Ranch Isle.

Mrs. Bond and Bessie were up, awaiting him, and Buffalo Bill heard him come in and soon joined them.

"Well, Mayhew?" said Bessie anxiously.

"Neither the Surgeon Scout nor Dashing Charlie have returned, Miss Bessie."

Buffalo Bill's face clouded at this, and he asked:

"Have they not been heard from?"

"No, they departed as Mrs. Bond said, and evidently prepared for a long jaunt."

"The colonel at last became anxious and Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Onderdonk started in search of them, with two scouts and twenty soldiers."

"They discovered that they had gone toward the mountains, evidently following a trail, and they tracked them as far as Phantom Pass, although it was so long after their departure."

"That night when in camp at Phantom Pass it rained very hard and to trail them beyond was utterly impossible."

"They went however in search of them for a day and then gave it up, convinced that they had gone on up into the Indian country."

"This was all you learned, Mr. Mayhew?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I will rouse my men and start at once, for Mrs. Bond has kindly gotten provisions for us, and Jerry Joslyn has selected the best horses on the ranch, and we shall carry one extra animal each, in case we may be pressed."

"I will find the Surgeon Scout, or know his fate," Buffalo Bill said in his determined way when he set his mind upon anything.

Then he added:

"Fortunately we know just where to go to make our start, and that is to Phantom Pass, and, Mr. Mayhew, I would like to ask you to ride over to the fort again to-morrow and should they have come in, or do come in during the day, you will have a courier dispatched after us to call us back, for I am going into the Indian country if I do not find them this side."

"I will come myself, Mr. Cody, for I know the country well," and then Manning Mayhew went out to lend all the aid he could to get the scout and his men off.

Suddenly an idea struck Buffalo Bill of making use of Red Robin and he said:

"Miss Bessie, Red Robin was one of the Deserter Captain's band; he knows the country perfectly, and perhaps the very place to find the outlaw leader, so, suppose I take him along with me, promising that upon his return he shall have the money we took from him and be allowed to go his way."

"The very thing, so take him by all means."

The outlaw was at once aroused and Buffalo Bill told him what he desired.

Red Robin was not exactly pleased with the prospect, but by his evil life he had put his hand in the lion's mouth, and there was nothing left for him to do but obey.

So, he, too, mounted his horse, and with an extra in lead, joined the scouts as they were drawn up before the cabin ready to start.

Mrs. Bond had fitted them out most generously with provisions, their weapons had been looked to, and their horses were certainly very fine animals.

At last the chief of scouts raised his hat in farewell, and rode away at the head of his men.

Bessie watched them disappear in the darkness, and said to her mother:

"Heaven grant that they find Surgeon Powell and Dashing Charlie, for what a loss would they be if they have fallen into the hands of the Indians."

"Yes, but Buffalo Bill is going to find the man who is as dear to him as a brother, and he will do it if man can accomplish it," was the reply of Mrs. Bond, and then she added:

"Now, Bessie, you must go to bed, for verily I believe you are made of iron to stand what you have done."

"Say whalebone rather, mother," was the laughing response.

"But indeed I am tired and I feel as though I would like to sleep for a week without waking."

And while Bessie was seeking her much needed rest, on through the darkness rode the tireless scouts, ever ready to do a good deed, or go to the rescue of a friend.

The chief of scouts set the pace, and a brisk one it was.

He was anxious to get well away from the vicinity of the fort before any one might be riding about and see them.

When dawn came Fort Beauvoir was a score of miles behind them, and halting only long enough for breakfast they pushed on once more.

It was while the sun was yet well up above the western horizon that they came under the shadow of Phantom Pass and went into camp.

An examination of the ground showed that no one had passed that way lately.

In fact, the only trails visible were those of buffalo, deer, and wolves.

"We will camp here until morning, pards, and then, if no one comes from the fort to call us back, from Surgeon Powell having gone in by another trail, we will push for the Indian country after I have tried one plan to find them."

"And what is that, Bill?" asked Texas Jack, for he saw that the chief had decided upon some plan, and he knew from long experience that Buffalo Bill's plots were good ones.

"My plan is to signal the old Hermit of the Mountains, for you know, Jack, that he comes at a signal, and we are not so very far from where he could see a flag from his retreat in the hills."

"A good idea."

"I think so, for as he helped me out once he may do so again."

"Then we will try him, by all means," was Texas Jack's rejoinder.

"If we fail, I am going to send Red Robin into the Sioux villages, for, as The Deserters were the allies of the red-skins, he will be considered a friend, and can find out."

"Bill, you are on the right track to find Surgeon Powell and Dashing Charlie," declared Texas Jack, with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER LXII.

A SWOOP ON THE RETREAT.

THE Surgeon Scout and Dashing Charlie stood like men transfixed by all they had heard.

There, before them was the heir who had

been so long lost—the heir who was looked upon as dead.

There, too, was the man who had struck the chord in his heart to cause him to be willing to live, to claim the title and fortune that were his.

Believing himself alone in the world, the Hermit had been willing to give to another his right to title and riches, and had tried to let all believe him to be dead.

He was willing now, when he knew that his child, his sole heir, lived, and was not lying in a grave in the country of the Sioux, to claim all for her sake, to come again into civilization.

And that the half-breed knew all about the Daughter of the Regiment being proven to be the daughter of Granger Goldhurst, the lost heir, Surgeon Powell was convinced, as also was Dashing Charlie.

There was not the shadow of a doubt about it in fact, and yet the half-breed had sought the sorrowing man out in his Hermit life, to make money out of him, pretending that he alone knew the secret of where his daughter was.

The more he thought over the rascally act of the half-breed, the more angry Surgeon Powell became, and he could hardly restrain himself.

How to break in upon the scene he hardly knew.

Of course the half-breed must be cowed or he would do harm—perhaps kill either himself or Charlie Emmett.

Then, too, the Hermit, in his surprise, might show resistance, though the Surgeon Scout trusted that such would not be the case.

He must, however, take chances, and would do so, willingly, now that it seemed necessary.

Another thing was to be taken into consideration, and that was the panther and the two wolves.

In the presence of their master they were quiet, although a stranger was there, but with others appearing suddenly, would they not fly at their throats?

The situation was a most critical one, and the Surgeon Scout, brave as he was, hesitated before precipitating a climax.

He was glad that he was in uniform, for, seen by the Hermit, it might at least hold him in check, as he had never been known to do an unfriendly act toward the whites, or men of the army.

"Charlie?"

The Surgeon Scout whispered the name.

"Yes, sir!"

Back came the whisper.

"I shall step out and cover the half-breed."

"Yes, sir."

"Keep the Hermit covered, though I believe he will not resist; but, under no circumstances harm him."

"I understand, sir."

"Then, too, you must keep another gun ready for those brutes, for they will doubtless leap upon me; but I must keep my muzzle covering the Mexican."

"I'll do it, sir."

"Now, are you ready?"

"Yes, sir, all ready," and Dashing Charlie held a revolver in each hand as he stood behind the door.

Surgeon Powell also had a revolver in each hand, and, nerving himself to the deadly work which he believed was before him, he stepped boldly into the doorway.

As Dr. Frank appeared in the doorway, facing the Hermit and the Mexican, he covered the latter with his revolver, and cried out:

"Half-Breed Harry, hands up! I want you!"

A perfect yell of terror broke from the lips of Half-Breed Harry as he heard the words, a startled exclamation from the Hermit, and yelps and a howl from the wolves and the panther, for the whole party, human and brute, had been taken completely by surprise.

But, the Hermit made no effort to draw a weapon, when one glance showed him the tall, splendid form of the Surgeon Scout, in uniform; instead, he sprang quickly toward the enraged panther and wolves, who were just coming under cover of the scout's revolvers, for Dashing Charlie had sprang into the doorway with Frank Powell's entrance, to protect his chief.

The half-breed had not heeded the warning of the Surgeon Scout, and, in spite of the command to throw his hands above his head, had dropped his right upon his revolver and drawn it from his belt.

At once came the sharp ring of a shot, and a cry of mingled terror, rage and pain came from the Mexican, as the bullet of the Surgeon Scout cut through his hand.

But the Half-Breed was not one to yield when at bay, and his left hand drew the other revolver from his belt, when a second shot rung out, and the Surgeon Scout had sent a bullet through his arm. Then the man was powerless and at his mercy.

"Don't kill me, senior, for I submit," he cried, now, and Surgeon Powell was at his side in an instant and said with a gentleness that his wild life has never taken from him:

"You forced me to disarm you by severe methods; but, let me look to your wounds now."

The Hermit, meanwhile, had driven off his wild beasts, thus keeping them from falling under Dashing Charlie's deadly fire; and now, turning to the Surgeon Scout, the Man of the Hills said:

"I do not understand this interruption into my retreat, sir."

"Permit me to explain, sir, when I have looked to this outlaw's wounds, for I am a surgeon."

"He an outlaw?" gasped the Hermit.

"Yes, sir, he is nothing else, as I will prove to you. I tracked him here, to your retreat, where he came to rob you."

"To rob me? I don't understand," and the Hermit betrayed his astonishment.

"Yes, to rob you, of gold. Under pretense of finding your child, your beautiful daughter, to whom I will be most glad to lead you. We overheard all that the fellow told you, and that you agreed to, for we shadowed you here, an hour ago."

"Now to see if this man is seriously wounded, for I did not so intend when I fired," and Surgeon Powell turned once more to Half-Breed Harry, leaving the Hermit dumb with amazement and gazing at him as he really did not yet quite understand the situation.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE HERMIT'S MISSION.

THE Surgeon Scout examined the wounded hand of Half-Breed Harry first and found that the bullet had passed through it, shattering the bone of the second finger.

He dressed it skillfully, for he always carried a Surgeon's case swung at his belt, and then turned to the arm.

The bullet had touched the bone above the wrist, and this wound was also dressed, the Hermit looking on in silence, while the Mexican was muttering Spanish oaths all the while.

"As you are powerless to do harm, Half-Breed Harry, I will simply prevent your running away by tying your feet," remarked the Surgeon Scout, and he soon had the prisoner secure against escape.

"Now, Mr. Goldhurst, I shall be glad to talk to you, sir," and Frank Powell turned to the Hermit.

"As I will be to you, sir. You are a surgeon of the army, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, from Fort Beauvoir."

"Are you he whom I have heard of as the Surgeon Scout?"

"Yes, sir, and my comrade here is Dashing Charlie of whom you have doubtless also heard."

"Yes, many a time; but are you two alone?"

"We are, sir."

"And so came here?"

"Yes, we were shadowing that man, Half-Breed Harry."

"Who is he?"

"He is a Mexican, and was chief of cowboys upon the ranch of Miss Bessie Bond; but he showed the cloven foot, was in league with outlaws, and came here to rob you by professing to take you to your daughter. It is well known to him that she was acknowledged some time ago as your heiress, you being thought to be dead."

"I saw you blindfold him and bring him here, so it was an easy matter for us to follow and to overhear all that was said between you."

"Permit me, Mr. Goldhurst, or rather

Lord Vancourt, to introduce myself as Surgeon Powell, and to congratulate you upon your discovering the fact that your daughter is one of the dearest little women alive, and will be most happy to greet her father, whom she has long mourned as dead."

The Hermit grasped the outstretched hand of the Surgeon Scout, but could not speak, so he sat down in silence, while Charlie Emmett also came forward and greeted him, at the same time keeping his weather-eye upon the restless panther and wolves.

After awhile the Hermit spoke and he told his pathetic story in a way that touched Frank Powell and Dashing Charlie to the heart.

"I awoke," he said, "from a dream of madness to find myself among the murderers of those I loved."

"I found out how I was regarded by the red-skies, and determining to render service to others I came here to dwell."

"I have tried to do my duty toward my own race, but was anxious to remain in hiding here until I died."

"Then this man came to me and told me of my child, and I longed to see her. Now you tell me that I will do so?"

"Yes, and before very long; but, Mr. Goldhurst, I am going to ask you, first, to serve your people while you can."

"Gladly."

"You can go to the Sioux camp at your will, can you not?"

"Most assuredly."

"Then I wish you would leave us here in your retreat, and mounted upon one of our horses, go the Sioux village and see if you can find there the Deserter Captain—a renegade, an outlaw, and all that is vile?"

"He is, indeed, all that is vile."

"You can readily induce him to come here with you, and you will be doing a noble service to aid us in capturing him. Will you do this?"

"Yes; and more, I will do all I can to persuade the red-skies to make peace, telling them there is no hope for them to save their villages if they do not."

"I will start at once, if you say so, sir."

"Wait until the morrow, and we will talk it all over to-night."

"This fellow, Dashing Charlie and myself will guard, and I will care for his wounds."

"By the time you return he will be able to go with us; then we will start for Fort Beauvoir, when, I promise you, you shall see your dearly loved daughter."

The man who had so long shunned his fellow-man was more than willing to undertake the work set for him, and was anxious for the night to pass away.

All were accommodated in the cabin, and with the early dawn the Hermit was upon his way for the Sioux village, Surgeon Powell accompanying him several miles upon his journey.

Upon his return to the retreat, Surgeon Powell found Dashing Charlie arguing with the prisoner to try and convince him that he should make a full confession of his crimes if he would save his soul from perdition.

"I would never save my neck if I did so," was the philosophical response of the half-breed.

The days passed by at the Hermit's retreat, and Surgeon Powell and Dashing Charlie began to grow very anxious about Mr. Goldhurst.

They had not expected him to be gone over a week at furthest, and nearly a month had gone by since his departure.

The half-breed's wounds were healing well, and the Surgeon Scout amused himself, after his daily care of his patient, in making friends with the panther and other pets of the Hermit.

At length, just as Surgeon Powell and Dashing Charlie were arranging to make their way back to the fort, sure that harm had befallen him, Granger Goldhurst came into his retreat.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE SURGEON SCOUT'S SECRET.

THE delay of the Hermit, it was soon found, was caused by his desire to visit each one of the Indian camps, to do all he could in convincing them of their madness in attacking the whites.

Then, too, he had been more than anxious to find the Deserter Captain, but in this had

been unsuccessful, for the Indians had not seen him.

He had, however, met a renegade white man in the Indian camp with whom he had become most friendly, and from him learned a secret, which he told Surgeon Powell, regarding the Deserter Captain's identity.

Delighted to have the Hermit return, and glad to know the secret he had learned, Surgeon Frank at once determined to hasten to the fort.

The Hermit aided in the preparations, and was of course to go along, as the Surgeon Scout had an extra horse. So also did Half-breed Harry.

The morning after the return of the Hermit they started bright and early, the panther and wolves, as also the owl, eagle and raven, being taken along, having been presented to Surgeon Powell by Mr. Goldhurst—no longer the Hermit.

They had reached the valley when, suddenly, the Hermit called out:

"See! there is a signal in the valley—a flag!"

All saw that there was a flag flying from a staff—a red flag it looked like.

It was not far from the timber motte where the half-breed had been lying in wait for the Hermit, and as they approached, out rode Buffalo Bill and his party.

It would be impossible to describe the greetings that passed, and how rejoiced Buffalo Bill and his scouts were at finding Surgeon Powell and Dashing Charlie, and with them Half-Breed Harry and the Hermit.

Buffalo Bill told the surgeon of the trip to Mexico, and how he had not yet returned to the fort; when Frank Powell said:

"Bill, I have a secret to tell you, and I am sure there is no doubt about its being true.

"It is that Emerald Ed is the Deserter Captain, in disguise; the only way to do is to go and capture him by night, and carry him to Ranch Isle, when Mayhew and his cowboys will take him, with that man Alvarez and the half-breed, to Mexico, and your friend the governor-general will make short work of them. "You, I think, had better go along with your men, as far as the Mexican frontier, and send a courier ahead to ask the governor-general to have a guard there to receive the prisoners.

"This will prevent Colonel Loyal from having any trouble in the matter."

This plan of the surgeon was decided upon at once, and so Red Robin was sent ahead, when they reached the settlement at night, to call Emerald Ed out of his saloon into the clutches of Buffalo Bill and his men.

The whole party camped some miles from the settlement, and as Red Robin did his work well, the gambler was led into the trap to find himself a prisoner.

Mounted upon a horse, he was taken rapidly away to Ranch Isle along with the half-breed, under the escort of Buffalo Bill and his men.

The next morning Surgeon Powell and the Hermit, with Dashing Charlie, rode on to the fort, and went at once to Colonel Loyal's quarters; where, soon after, Lord Lonsfield, Sir John Reeder and Madge came to find in the White Spirit of the Mountains none other than Granger Goldhurst, the Lost Heir!

CHAPTER LXV.

CONCLUSION.

THE scenes that followed the discovery of the father of Madge Burton in the old Hermit, and the hearing of his strange story, was more than a nine days' wonder at the fort, and the welcome which Granger Goldhurst received, proved to him that there was still joy in living, for him.

Then came Buffalo Bill and his party to the fort, with their story of their trail to Mexico, and how the Deserter Captain had been captured, and was none other than Emerald Ed, and who was much wanted in Mexico for his many crimes there.

Keno Kate, the Faro Fairy, had at once disappeared after learning of the capture of her husband, and it was said that she had gone to Mexico to try and rescue Emerald Ed having hired an escort of men in the settlement to accompany her.

But though she did go, she arrived too late, as the governor-general had executed the three prisoners, the Deserter Captain, Lieu-

tenant Alvarez and Henrico Nunez, the half-breed, the day he got them in his possession, for all of them were proven conspirators against the Government.

With her husband, whom she had so dearly loved, gone forever, the strange woman, Keno Kate, went into a convent it was said to pass the remainder of her days in doing penance for her wayward life.

The day of the execution of the three criminals Captain Alvarez was released, and with a pardon in his pocket, and a commission as major, for he had been reinstated in the army, he started upon the trail, with the Ranch Isle cowboys, to visit the maiden who had been so true to him through all, and to make known to her that the captain-general had kept his pledge to make her a widow; hence there was no barrier to her becoming his wife.

When the English officers started back to England, though Granger Goldhurst would not accompany them, his daughter did, and having fully secured her fortune she returned to the United States and became the wife of Lieutenant Onderdonk, her father having already established an elegant home for her in the land of his adoption.

Red Robin got his reward in gold, and it was said reformed and became a deacon, but this we will not vouch for.

As for the border heroes of my story, some of them have gone on their last long trails beyond the grave, but Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell, Captain Taylor and Dashing Charlie yet live to tell the strange stories of their wild and eventful lives in the Wild West.

THE END.

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432 Invincible Logan, the Pinkerton Ferret.
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- 549 Belshazzar Brick, the Bailiff of Blue Blazes.
- 533 Oregon, the Sport With a Scar.
- 525 Fresh Frank, the Derringer Daisy.
- 503 The Dude from Denver.
- 478 Pinnacle Pete; or, The Fool from Way Back.
- 459 Major Sunshine, the Man of Three Lives.
- 429 Hair Trigger Tom of Red Bend.
- 402 Snapshot Sam; or, The Angels' Flat Racket.
- 396 The Piper Detective; or, The Gilt Edge Gang.
- 375 Royal George, the Taree in One.
- 356 Three Handsome Sports; or, The Combination.
- 344 Double Shot Dave of the Left Hand.
- 333 Derringer Dick, the Man with the Drop.
- 300 A Sport in Spectacles; or, Bad Time at Bunco.
- 268 Magic Mike, the Man of Frills.
- 229 Captain Cutsleeve; or, The Little Sport.
- 214 The Two Cool Sports; or, Gentle of the Gulch.
- 192 The Lightning Sport.
- 182 Hands Up; or, The Knights of the Canyon.
- 160 Soft Hand, Sharp; or, The Man with the Sand.
- 145 Pistol Pards; or, The Silent Sport from Cinnabar.

BY CAPT. FRED. WHITTAKER.

- 614 The Showman Detective; or, The Mad Magician.
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- 445 Journeymen John, the Champion.
- 412 Larry Locke, the Man of Iron.
- 406 Old Pop Hicks, Showman.
- 378 John Armstrong, Mechanic.
- 326 The Whitest Man in the Mines.
- 310 The Marshal of Satanstown; or, The League.
- 303 Top-Notch Tom, the Cowboy Outlaw.
- 295 Old Cross-Eye, the Maverick-Hunter.
- 290 The Lost Corvette; or, Blakeley's Last Cruise.
- 284 The Three Frigates; or, Old Ironsides' Revenge.
- 277 The Saucy Jane, Privateer.
- 272 Seth Slocum, Railroad Surveyor.
- 265 Old Double-Sword; or, Pilots and Pirates.
- 253 A Yankee Cossack; or, The Queen of the Nihilists.
- 247 Alligator Ike; or, The Secret of the Everglade.
- 242 The Fog Devil; or, The Skipper of the Flash.
- 230 The Flying Dutchman of 1880.
- 226 The Mad Hussars; or, The O's and the Mac's.
- 215 Parson Jim, King of the Cowboys.
- 211 Colonel Plunger; or, The Unknown Sport.
- 206 One Eye, the Cannoneer.
- 193 The Man in Red; or, The Ghost of the Old Guard.
- 187 The Death's Head Cuirassiers.
- 174 The Phantom Knights.
- 159 Red Rudiger, the Archer.
- 132 Nemo, King of the Tramps.
- 115 The Severed Head; or, The Castle Coucy Secret.
- 108 The Duke of Diamonds.
- 98 The Rock Rider; or, The Spirit of the Sierra.
- 96 Double Death; or, The Spy of Wyoming.
- 69 The Irish Captain. A Tale of Fontenoy.
- 65 The Red Rajah; or, The Scourge of the Indies.
- 39 The Russian Spy; or, The Starry Cross Brothers.

BY OLL COOMES.

- 619 Kit Bandy & Co, the Border Detectives.
- 148 One-Armed Alf, the Giant Hunter.
- 237 Long Beard, the Giant Spy.
- 99 The Giant Rifleman; or, Wild Camp Life.
- 51 Red Rob, the Boy Road-Agent.
- 48 Idaho Tom, the Young Outlaw of Silverland.
- 46 Bowtie-Knife Ben, the Nor'west Hunter.
- 44 Old Dan Rackback, the Great Exterminator.
- 43 Dakota Dan, the Reckless Ranger.
- 7 Death-Notch, the Destroyer.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE.

- 683 Captain Adair, the Cattle King.
- 567 Captain Midnight, the Man of Craft.
- 544 The Back to Back Pards.
- 522 The Champion Three.
- 502 Bareback Buck, the Centaur of the Plains.
- 472 Six Foot Si; or, The Man to "Tie To."
- 431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.
- 404 Silver Sid; or, A "Daisy" Bluff.
- 380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent.
- 359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo.
- 338 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.
- 299 Three of a Kind; or, Dick, Despard and the Sport.
- 280 Tiger Dick's Lone Hand.
- 251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard.
- 207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Mare.
- 171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.
- 114 The Gentleman from Pike.
- 80 A Man of Nerve; or, Caliban the Dwarf.
- 54 Always on Hand; or, The Foot-Hills Sport.
- 29 Tiger Dick, Faro King; or, The Cashier's Crime.
- 4 The Kidnapper; or, The Northwest Shanghai.
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- 604 The Detective in Rags; or, The Grim Shadower.
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- 711 Dan Damon, the Gilt-Edge Detective.
- 701 Silver Steve, the Branded Sport.
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- 684 V-lvet Van, the Mystery Shadower.
- 673 The Dude Desperado.
- 671 Jason Clew, the Silk-Handed Ferret.
- 664 Monk Morel, the Man-Hun er.
- 654 Sol Sphinx, the Ferret Detective.
- 613 Red Pard and Yellow.
- 608 Silent Sam, the Shadow Sphinx.
- 592 Captain Sid, the Shasta Ferret.
- 579 Old Cormorant, the Bowery Shadow.
- 569 Captain Cobra, the Hooded Mystery.
- 559 Danton, the Shadow Sharp.
- 550 Silk Hand, the Mohave Ferret.
- 513 The Magnate Detective.
- 532 Jack Javert, the Independent Detective.
- 523 Reynard of Red Jack; or, The Lost Detective.
- 512 Captain Velvet's Big Stake.
- 505 Phil Fox, the Genteel Spotter.
- 496 Richard Redfire, the Two Worlds' Detective.
- 487 Sunshine Sam, a Chip of the Old Block.
- 480 Hawksphear, the Man with a Secret.
- 468 Coldgrip in Deadwood.
- 460 Captain Coldgrip, the Detective.
- 453 Captain Coldgrip's Long Trail.
- 447 Volcano, the Frisco Spy.
- 441 The California Sharp.
- 434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective.
- 421 Father Ferret, the Frisco Shadow.
- 413 Captain Coldgrip in New York.
- 407 Captain Coldgrip's Nerve; or, Injun Nick.
- 400 Captain Coldgrip; or, The New York Spotter.
- 392 The Lost Bonanza; or, The Boot of Silent Hound.
- 382 The Bonanza Band; or, Dread Don of Cool Clan.
- 374 Major Blister, the Sport of Two Cities.
- 365 Keen Kennard, the Shasta Shadow.
- 352 The Desperate Dozen.
- 347 Denver Duke, the Man with "Sand."
- 340 Cool Conrad, the Dakota Detective.
- 335 Flash Dan, the Nabob; or, Blades of Bowie Bar.
- 321 California Claude, the Lone Bandit.
- 294 Broadcloth Burt, the Denver Dandy.
- 278 Hercules Goldspur, the Man of the Velvet Hand.

BY WM. G. PATTEN.

- 715 Double-Voice Dan on Deck.
- 702 Double-Voice Dan, the Always-on-Deck Detective.
- 696 Double-Voice Dan, the Go-it Alone Detective.
- 689 The Sparkler Sharp.
- 676 Hurricane Hal, the Cowboy Hotspur.
- 669 Old True Blue, the Trusty.
- 663 The Giant Sport; or, Sold to Satan.
- 656 Old Plug Ugly, the Rough and Ready.
- 648 Gold Glove Gid, the Man of Grit.
- 641 Aztec Jack, the Desert Nomad.
- 631 Colonel Cool, the Santa Fe Sharp.
- 602 Captain Nameless, the Mountain Mystery.
- 571 Old Dismal, the Range Detective.
- 545 Hustler Harry, the Cowboy Sport.

BY CAPTAIN MARK WILTON.

- 323 Hotspur Hugh; or, The Banded Brothers.
- 311 Heavy Hand; or, The Marked Men.
- 305 Silver-Plated Sol, the Montana Rover.
- 291 Horseshoe Hank, the Man of Big Luck.
- 285 Lightning Bolt, the Canyon Terror.
- 276 Texa Chick, the Southwest Detective.
- 271 Stonelust, of Big Nugget Bend.
- 266 Leopard Luke, the King of Horse-Thieves.
- 263 Iron-Armed Abe, the Hunchback Destroyer.
- 258 Bullet Head, the Colorado Bravo.
- 245 Barranca Bill, the Revolver Champion.
- 237 Long-Haired Max; or, The Black League.
- 227 Buckshot Ben, the Man-Hunter of Idaho.
- 223 Canyon Dave, the Man of the Mountain.
- 219 The Scorpion Brothers; or, Mad Tom's Mission.
- 202 Cactus Jack, the Giant Guide.
- 194 Don Sombra, the California Road Gent.
- 176 Lady Jaguar, the Robber Queen.

BY SAM S. HALL—"Buckskin Sam."

- 511 Paint Pete, the Prairie Patrol.
- 371 Gold Buttons; or, The Up Range Pards.
- 358 The Prince of Pan Out.
- 342 Blanco Bill, the Mustang Monarch.
- 328 King Kent; or, The Bandits of the Bason.
- 322 The Crimson Coyotes; or, Nita, the Nemesis.
- 309 Raybold, the Rattling Ranger.
- 301 Boulder Bill; or, The Man from Taos.
- 293 Stampede Steve; or, The Doom of the Double.
- 287 Dandy Dave and his Horse, White Stocking.
- 282 The Merciless Marauders; or, Carl's Revenge.
- 273 Mountain Mose, the Gorge Outlaw.
- 269 The Bayou Bravo; or, The Terrible Trail.
- 264 The Crooked Three.
- 256 Double Dan, the Dastard; or, The Pirates.
- 250 The Rough Riders; or, Sharp Eye, the Scourge.
- 244 Merciless Mart, the Man Tiger of Missouri.
- 239 The Terrible Trio; or, The Angel of the Army.
- 225 Rocky Mountain Al; or, The Waif of the Range.
- 221 Desperate Duke, the Guadalupe "Galoot."
- 217 The Serpent of El Paso; or, Frontier Frank.
- 212 The Brazos Tigers; or, The Minute Men.
- 204 Big Foot Wallace, the King of the Lariat.
- 199 Diamond Dick, the Dandy from Denver.
- 195 The Lone Star Gambler; or, Magnolia's Maid.
- 191 The Terrible Tonkaway; or, Old Rocky's Pards.
- 186 The Black Bravo; or, The Tonkaway's Triumph.
- 178 Dark Dashwood, the Desperate.
- 90 Wild Will, the Mad Ranchero.
- 3 Kit Carson, Jr., the Crack Shot.

BY COL. THOMAS H. MONSTERY.

- 332 Spring-Heel Jack; or, The Masked Mystery.
- 262 Fighting Tom, the Terror of the Troughs.
- 236 Champion Sam; or, The Monarchs of the Show.
- 169 Corporal Cannon, the Man of Forty Duels.
- 157 Mourad, the Mameluke; or, The Three Sword masters.
- 150 El Rubio Bravo, King of the Swordsmen.
- 143 The Czar's Spy; or, The Nihilist League.
- 126 The Demon Duelist; or, The League of Steel.
- 82 Iron Wrist, the Swordmaster.

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- 657 Long Tom, the Privateer.
- 633 The Sea Spy.
- 621 The Red Privateer; or, The Midshipman Rover.
- 584 Fire Feather, the Buccaneer King.
- 517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail.
- 361 Tombstone Dick, the Train Pilot.
- 270 Andros, the Rover; or, The Pirate's Daughter.
- 122 Saul Sabberday, the Idiot Spy.
- 111 The Smuggler Captain; or, The Skipper's Crime.
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- 483 Flush Fred, the River Sharp.
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- 327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
- 315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
- 308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
- 298 Logger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
- 289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
- 274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
- 248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
- 222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
- 209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince.
- 129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.

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- 267 The White Squaw.
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- 706 Detective Burr's Seven Clues.
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- 690 The Matchless Detective.
- 680 XX, the Fatal Clew.

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- 643 Castlemaine, the Silent Sifter.
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- 606 The Drop Detective.
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- 582 Joram, the Detective Expert.
- 574 Old Falcon's Double.
- 561 The Thug King; or, The Falcon Detective's Foe.
- 548 Falconbridge, the Sphinx Detective.
- 536 Old Falcon's Foe; or, The Detective's Swell Job.
- 515 Short-Stop Maje, the Diamond Field Detective.
- 509 Old Falcon, the Thunderbolt Detective.
- 501 Springsteel Steve, the Retired Detective.
- 494 The Detective's Spy.
- 485 Rowlock, the Harbor Detective.
- 477 Dead-arm Brandt.
- 467 Mainwaring, the Salamander.
- 462 The Circus Detective.
- 451 Griplock, the Rocket Detective.
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- 424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.
- 386 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective.

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- 166 Owllet, the Robber Prince. By S. R. Urban.
- 153 The Doomed Dozen. By Dr. Frank Powell.
- 152 Captain Ironnerve, the Counterfeiter Chief.
- 146 The Doctor Detective. By George Lemuel.
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- 76 The Queen's Musketeers. By George Albany.
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661 The Get-There Sharp.
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645 Gopher Gabe, the Unseen Detective.
636 Dandy Darling, Detective.
627 Mossback Mose, the Mountaineer.
617 The Grip Sack Sharp's Even up.
597 Big Bandy, the Brigadier of Brimstone Butte.
588 Sandy sands, the Sharp from Snap City.
576 Silver-Tongued Sid; or, Grip Sack Sharp's Sweep.
564 The Grip-Sack Sharp; or, The Seraphs of Sodom.
555 Grip-Sack Sid, the Sample Sport.
547 The Buried Detective; or, Saul's Six Sensations.
541 Major Magnet, the Man of Nerve.
535 Dandy Dutch, the Decorator from Dead-Lift.
527 Dandy Andy, the Diamond Detective.
514 Gabe Gunn, the Grizzly from Ginseng.
504 Solemn Saul, the Sad Man from San Saba.
495 Rattlepate Rob; or, The Roundhead's Reprisal.
488 The Thoroughbred Sport.
474 Daddy Dead-Eye, the Despot of Dew Drop.
466 Old Rough and Ready, the Sage of Sundown.
458 Dutch Dan, the Pilgrim from Spitzenberg.
450 The Rustler Detective.
443 A Cool Hand; or, Pistol Johnny's Picnic.
438 Oklahoma Nick.
433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.
426 The Ghost Detective; or, The Secret Service Spy.
416 Monte Jim, the Black Sheep of Bismarck.
409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Pan Handle.
402 The Nameless Sport.
395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.
387 Dark Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills.
379 Howling Jonathan, the Terror from Headwaters.
372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record.
367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.
360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown.
355 Stormy Steve, the Mad Athlete.
351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective.
345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.
339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter.
331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport.
324 Old Forked Lightning, the Solitary.
317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.
302 Faro Saul, the Handsome Hercules.
292 Moke Horner, the Boss Roustabout.
286 Pistol Johnny; or, One Man in a Thousand.
283 Sleek Sam, the Devil of the Mines.
257 Death Trap Diggings; or, A Man 'Way Back.
249 Elephant Tom, of Durango.
241 Spitfire Saul, King of the Rustlers.
233 The Old Boy of Tombstone.
201 Pirate of the Placers; or, Joaquin's Death Hunt.
197 Revolver Rob; or, The Belle of Nugget Camp.
180 Old '49; or, The Amazon of Arizona.
170 Sweet William, the Trapper Detective.
165 Joaquin, the Terrible.
154 Joaquin, the Saddle King.
141 Equinox Tom, the Bully of Red Rock.
127 Sol Scott, the Masked Miner.
119 Alabama Joe; or, The Yazo Man-Hunters.
105 Dan Brown of Denver; or, The Detective.
88 Big George; or, The Five Outlaw Brothers.
71 Captain Cool Blade; or, Mississippi Man Shark.
67 The Boy Jockey; or, Honesty vs. Crookedness.
64 Double-Sight, the Death Shot.
50 Jack Rabbit, the Prairie Sport.
47 Pacific Pete, the Prince of the Revolver.
45 Old Bull's-Eye, the Lightning Shot.
40 Long-Haired Pards; or, The Tartars of the Plains.
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646 Dark John, the Grim Guard.
638 Murdock, the Dread Detective.
623 Dangerous Dave, the Never-Beaten Detective.
611 Alkali Abe, the Game Chicken from Texas.
596 Rustler Rube; the Round-Up Detective.
585 Dan Dixon's Double.
575 Steady Hand, the Napoleon of Detectives.
563 Wyoming Zeke, the Hotspur of Honey Suckle.
551 Garry Kean, the Man with Backbone.
539 Old Doubledark, the Willy Detective.
531 Saddle-Chief Kit, the Prairie Centaur.
521 Paradise Sam, the Nor'-West Pilot.
513 Texas Tartar, the Man With Nine Lives.
506 Uncle Honest, the Peacemaker of Hornets' Nest.
498 Central Pacific Paul, the Mail Train Spy.
492 Border Bullet, the Prairie Sharpshooter.
486 Kansas Kitten, the Northwest Detective.
479 Gladiator Gabe, the Samson of Sassajack.
470 The Duke of Dakota.
463 Gold Gauntlet, the Gulch Gladiator.
455 Yank Yellowbird, the Tall Hustler of the Hills.
449 Bluff Burke, King of the Rockies.
442 Wild West Walt, the Mountain Veteran.
437 Deep Duke; or, The Man of Two Lives.
427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.
415 Hot Heart, the Detective Spy.
405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
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297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
279 The Gold Dragoon, or, California Bloodhound.

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688 The River Rustlers.
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666 Old Adamant, the Man of Rock.
618 Kansas Karl, the Detective King.
552 Prince Primrose, the Flower of the Flock.
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679 Revello, the Pirate Cruiser; or, The Rival Rovers.
672 The Red Rapiet; or, The Sea Rover's Bride.
662 The Jew Detective; or, The Beautiful Convict.
658 The Cowboy Clan; or, The Tigress of Texas.
653 The Lasso King's League. A companion Story to "Buck Taylor, the Saddle King."
640 The Rover's Retribution.
635 The Ex Buccaneer; or, The Stigma of Sin.
630 The Sea Thief.
625 Red Wings; or, The Gold Seekers of the Bahamas.
615 The Three Buccaneers.
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530 The Savages of the Sea.
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510 El Moro, the Corsair Commodore.
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482 Ocean Tramps; or, The Desperadoes of the Deep.
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446 Ocean Ogre, the Outcast Corsair.
435 The One-Armed Buccaneer.
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393 The Convict Captain.
388 The Giant Buccaneer; or, The Wrecker Witch.
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691 Buffalo Bill's Blind Trail.
682 Buffalo Bill's Secret Service Trail.
667 Buffalo Bill's Swoop; or, The King of the Mines.
649 Buck Taylor, the Saddle King.
644 Buffalo Bill's Bonanza.
*639 The Gold King; or, Montebello, the Magnificent.
629 Daredeath Dick; or, Buffalo Bill's Daring Role.
*599 The Dead Shot Nine; or, My Pards of the Plains.
517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail.
*414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.
*401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
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*394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
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329 The League of Three; or, Buffalo Bill's Pledge.
*319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
*304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
*243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
189 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.
175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.
168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot.
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117 Buffalo Bill's Strange Pard.
92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King.
*83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
*53 Death-Trailer, the Chief of Scouts.

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- 448 Hark Kenton, the Traitor.
188 The Phantom Mazepa; or, The Hyena.
156 Velvet Face, the Border Bravo.
142 Captain Crimson, the Man of the Iron Face.
117 Dashing Dandy; or, The Hotspur of the Hills.
92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

- 708 Joe Phenix's Siren.
700 Joe Phenix's Unknown.
681 Joe Phenix's Specials.
674 Uncle Sun Up, the Born Detective.
670 The Lightweight Detective.
665 The Frisco Detective; or, The Golden Gate Find.
660 The Fresh in Montana.
652 Jackson Blake, the Bouncer Detective.
647 The Fresh of Frisco at Santa Fe.
637 Joe Phenix in Crazy Camp.
632 Joe Phenix's Master Search.
628 Joe Phenix's Combin'.
620 Joe Phenix's Silent Six.
613 Keen Billy, the Sport.
607 Old Benzine, the "Hard Case" Detective.
601 Joe Phenix's Shadow.
594 Fire Face, the Silver King's Foe.
583 The Silver Sharp Detective.
577 Tom of California.
570 The Actress Detective; or, The Invisible Hand.
562 Lone Hand, the Shadow.
556 Fresh, the Sport-Chevaier.
537 Blake, the Mountain Lion.
529 The Fresh in New York.
520 The Lone Hand on the Caddo.
497 The Fresh in Texas.
490 The Lone Hand in Texas.
475 Chin Chin, the Chinese Detective.
465 The Actor Detective.
461 The Fresh on the Rio Grande.
440 The High Horse of the Pacific.
423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.
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391 Kate Scott, the Decoy Detective.
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591 Duke Daniels, the Society Detective.
580 Shadowing a Shadow.
565 Prince Paul, the Postman Detective.
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